

# SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TRENDS RESEARCH IN ITALY AND CROATIA'S COASTAL AND INNER AREAS REPORT

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*LP1, PP2, PP3*



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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

PP2 supported by LP1 and PP3 realized this report which is the groundwork of the whole project. The **methodology** for its realization foresaw different steps. First of all, the partners made research and analysis of the latest trends in sustainable travel in Europe based on EU Travel Commission, Eurostat sources and on other well-known sources by PP2, who daily deals with these types of tasks (1.1). Secondly, desk research, some works already did for other European projects (i.e. **FramesPort, Made in Land**), direct dialogue with some stakeholders (e.g. in occasion of the Kick-off Meeting and with videocalls) together with the experience and contacts of the project's partners made possible to describe the offer of the eligible and project area (1.2), analyse the two targets and their needs (2, 3). This overall work together with direct discussion among partners made possible to identify 10 relevant themes, based on the tourist resources of both eligible and project area, upon which the itineraries will be created, focusing on the target of people travelling with their pets, especially guide dogs. Finally, the research includes several good practices (both from Italy and Croatia) in terms of accessibility for the target chosen related to the themes identified in the first stage. The themes and the feasibility of creating itineraries based on them for the two targets were validated thanks to the focus groups realized by LP1 and PP3. [Please note that the several analyses realized in this report refer gradually to European level, Country level (Italy-Croatia), Eligible Area, Project Area (Pesaro-Urbino province and Split-Dalmatia County). **All analysis and research based on a wider area than the project one are considered useful and coherent also for the project area.**]

This report is a very useful instrument for the project partners to better understand the current tourism situation, the targets to be involved and the offer of the project and eligible area. Moreover, the report is useful for next activities to be done, especially the training sessions and for the presentation of the project to the wider public. The report, indeed, contains useful data and material to make stakeholders understand the importance of sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity of these markets, but also useful material to understand how to realize appropriate products for these targets.



## 1. SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TRENDS, TOURISM OFFER AND COMMON THEMES

Travel and tourism play a pivotal role in shaping global economies and fostering cultural exchange. Among the myriad of captivating destinations across the world, Europe stands out as a beacon of exploration and discovery. With its rich history, diverse cultures and breathtaking landscapes, Europe estimated 2.72 billion night stays in 2022, with monthly tourism figures continuously increasing and finally approaching the levels of the corresponding months in 2019: during the first half of 2022 (January-June), the number of nights spent in tourist accommodations were down by 11.0% compared to 2019, while the July-December period closely mirrored the 2019 levels of nights spent (-1.9%). The 2023 situation keeps improving with 1.2 billion nights spent in tourist accommodations in the EU during the first half of 2023: nights by domestic guests exceed the pre-pandemic level by 3.6%, international guests' nights are catching up well but have yet to reach the 2019 level (-2.0% compared with first half of 2019) (Eurostat, 2023).



The travel and tourism sector in Europe is not only a magnet for adventure-seekers, but also a provider of livelihoods. In 2022, this industry contributed to the creation of 34.7 million jobs, empowering individuals and communities across the continent. In 2019, Europe boasted a total of 717 thousand travel accommodations in EU countries ranging from cozy vacation rentals to luxurious hotels. Spain and Italy are the top two countries for overnight stays, with travellers spending 270 million and 201 million nights respectively in tourist accommodations (Statista, Statistics about Travel, Tourism & Hospitality in EU, 2019).

According to the World Tourism Barometer, this pre-pandemic trend keeps growing: in the first half of 2023, Europe reached 90% of pre-pandemic levels, driven by strong intra-regional demand, with Southern Mediterranean Europe having also recovered pre-pandemic levels in Q1 2023, while Western Europe, Northern Europe coming close to reaching those levels (UNWTO, World Tourism Barometer, May 2023).

### **1.1 SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TRENDS**

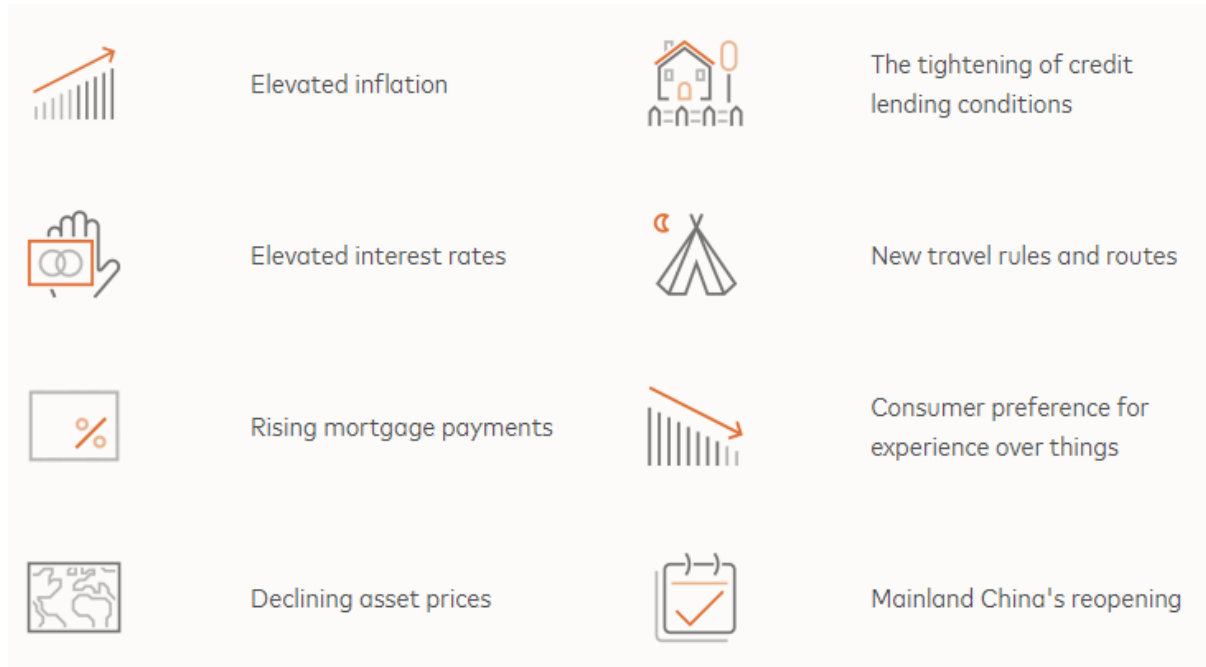
Sustainability is a theme that concerns all productive sectors, and is one of the objectives the United Nations, and therefore also the UNWTO, is trying to reach in order to respect the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The competitiveness of the European tourism industry itself is closely linked to its sustainability, and the European Commission works on several initiatives, being aware that the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism industry go hand-in-hand, as the quality of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by their natural and cultural environment and their integration into the local community. Long-term sustainability requires a balance between economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability. The need to reconcile economic growth and sustainable development also has an ethical dimension (European Commission, Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism).

Although being aware that a lot is still to be done, Europe already registers some good results in terms of tourism sustainability. To mention but one, the new Sustainable Travel Index for 2023 by Euromonitor International has shown that



19 out of the 20 first positions in this index are occupied by the European Union and Schengen Area Member States (with Croatia awarding position 17)<sup>1</sup>.

General travel trends and the need for a more sustainable way of travelling are strictly linked to the overall tourism situation. After two years of general travel recovery and in the face of a changing global economic landscape, some factors that contribute to the evolving economic and travel landscape must be highlighted. While inflation and interest rates impact consumers differently by market, many factors foster the world tourism market such as mainland China’s reopening, the emerging of new travel corridors and business travel, which is growing just as strong as leisure, and spending on experiences keeps outpacing spending on things. This trend of favoring experiences over things keeps growing among European travelers embracing cooler adventures and trending towards a growing desire to venture away from home.



Source: Mastercard Data&Services, Europe travel trends 2023: Embracing experiences.

Even if cosmopolitan cities and beautiful beaches remain popular stops, this new desire for unusual experiences often turns into a more sustainable one, both

<sup>1</sup> The Sustainable Travel Index uses 56 indicators across seven pillars – Environmental, Social, Economic, Risk, Demand, Transport and Lodgings.



from an environmental and social perspective. Destinations that include experiences or activities that support local communities have great potential, since consumers increasingly demand these types of initiatives that seek to generate sustainable development. The same happens in the luxury segment, where about three-quarters of travelers are willing to pay more for more sustainable trips or book eco-friendly accommodation over traditional, even if it costs a little more (Virtuoso survey). Some kind of activities that keep raising interests among travelers are for example: culinary tourism for travelers seeking out local, organic and farm-to-table dining experiences; cycling tourism in dedicated bike paths and bike-friendly cities; all types of active tourism as hiking, trekking, mountaineering, rafting; educational tourism-offer, meaning educational opportunities such as learning about local cultures, history, and conservation efforts, workshops, projects; looking for typical accommodations run by local people.

Sustainability in travel and tourism doesn't mean only sustainable experiences, but also sustainable ways of living destinations. According to Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report 74% of analyzed people (33,228 respondents from 35 countries) believe that sustainability is a vital part of our life, and that travel agencies should offer more sustainable options, and 76% wants to travel more sustainably over the next 12 months.



Source: Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report.





## 1.2 TOURISM OFFER IN THE ELIGIBLE AREA

The eligible area of 2021-2027 Interreg Italy – Croatia includes 25 Italian provinces and 8 Croatian counties facing the Adriatic Sea.



Source: Interreg Italy-Croatia website – Cooperation Area

Italy is one of the most prominent European tourist destinations, reaching over 118,5 million visitors in 2022 (ISTAT) and securing the third spot in popularity in Europe after France and Spain (Statista). The vitality of the travel and tourism sector was vividly demonstrated by its substantial contribution of 162.6 billion euros to Italy's GDP in 2021, a significant 9.1% of the nation's total economic output. The 25 provinces included in the Programme counted for the 24% of overall tourist arrivals and for the 27% of overall tourist stays in 2022. Even the offer of tourist accommodations in the project area is pretty important, with more than 74 thousand structures (33% on the total) and 1,5 million beds (30% on the total) in 2022 (Risposte Turismo on ISTAT data). The tourist offer of the area is wide and world-wide known. There are small and big art cities like Venice and Ferrara, the whole coast is known for the seaside offer, an offer strictly linked to the hinterland with its small towns and their typical craftsmanship,



cuisine, landscapes. Even nautical and cruise tourism are developed in the Italian program area with 1,5 cruise passengers in 2022 and a forecast of more than 2 million passengers for 2023 (Risposte Turismo, Adriatic Sea Tourism Report, 2023). The province of Pesaro-Urbino in the Italian project area counted 660.337 arrivals and 3.046.406 overnight stays in 2022.

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, in 2022 in Croatia there were 17.8 million tourist arrivals and 90.0 million tourist nights in commercial accommodation establishments: an increase of almost 40% in tourist arrivals and of 28% in overnight stays compared to 2021.

In 2022, nautical ports with sea moorings saw a total of 234,496 vessels in transit, marking an 11.6% increase compared to 2021. The majority of these vessels were sailboats (59.5%), followed by motor yachts (32.5%) and other types of vessels (8.0%). This diversity underscores the vibrant nautical tourism opportunities in the area. Among the regions, the County of Split-Dalmatia accounted for 28.1% of the total vessels in transit using sea moorings, while the County of Šibenik-Knin followed closely with 23.7%.

In the period from January to August 2023, Croatian seaports welcomed 69 foreign cruise vessels, which collectively completed 421 journeys. These voyages hosted a staggering 563,000 passengers, who spent a combined total of 970 days exploring the Republic of Croatia. Notably, Dubrovnik topped the list with 313 cruise ship visits, with Split (187 visits), Zadar (107 visits), Hvar (84 visits), Korčula (71 visits), Šibenik (61 visits), and Rovinj (45 visits) also featuring prominently as favored destinations for cruise ships during this period (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

The 8 Croatian counties included in the Programme counted in 2022 for the 89% of overall tourist arrivals and for the 96% of overall tourist overnight stays. Incredible numbers for the programme area, in which 89% of arrival and 93% of overnight stays regard international visitors (Risposte Turismo on Croatian Bureau of Statistics data). The County of Istria had the largest number of tourist arrivals and nights in 2022, as much as 4.6 million arrivals (25.8% of the total arrivals) and 27.7 million nights (30.8% of the total nights), followed by the counties of: Split-Dalmatia (18.6%), Primorje-Gorski kotar (16,6%), Zadar (14.2%), Dubrovnik-Neretva, Šibenik-Knin and Lika-Senj (altogether 17.1%).



Accommodation capacity is distributed in line with these figures, mainly along the Adriatic coast. The largest number of overnight stays was achieved in rooms, apartments and holiday homes (44%), followed by hotels (25%) and camps (23%). The Croatian project area (Split-Dalmatia County) is mainly interested by coastal tourism made of tourists interested on its beaches and nautical opportunities, while also including some big Croatian cities with huge cultural and historical value and attractiveness such Split and Hvar, while being next to other big cities such as Dubrovnik and Pula. The overall area includes over a thousand islands which are the paradise of nautical tourists having, at disposal 126 marinas for more than 20,7 thousand available berths, but are also interested by domestic ferry routes, which in 2022 saw more than 9 million passengers. (Risposte Turismo, Adriatic Sea Tourism Report 2023) In 2022, there were 234.496 vessels in transit in nautical ports using sea moorings, which was an increase of 11.6% in the number of vessels in transit compared to 2021, the majority were sailboats (59.5%), motor yachts (32.5%) and other vessels (8.0%), showing a variety in nautical tourism opportunity in the area. The County of Split-Dalmatia held 28.1% of the total number of vessels in transit that used sea moorings, followed by the County of Šibenik-Knin (23.7%). Within the Programme area two major natural parks, famous for their uniqueness, are found: the Plitvice Lakes National Park and the Paklenica National Park.

The Adriatic Sea is a significant tourism destination in Europe. Exploring the Adriatic area of these regions only provides breathtaking coastal vistas but also opportunities to delve into the rich heritage of both countries and venture into their picturesque inland regions. Both along the coast and inland, there is a journey filled with diverse experiences, from historical and cultural immersion to natural beauty and gastronomic delights.

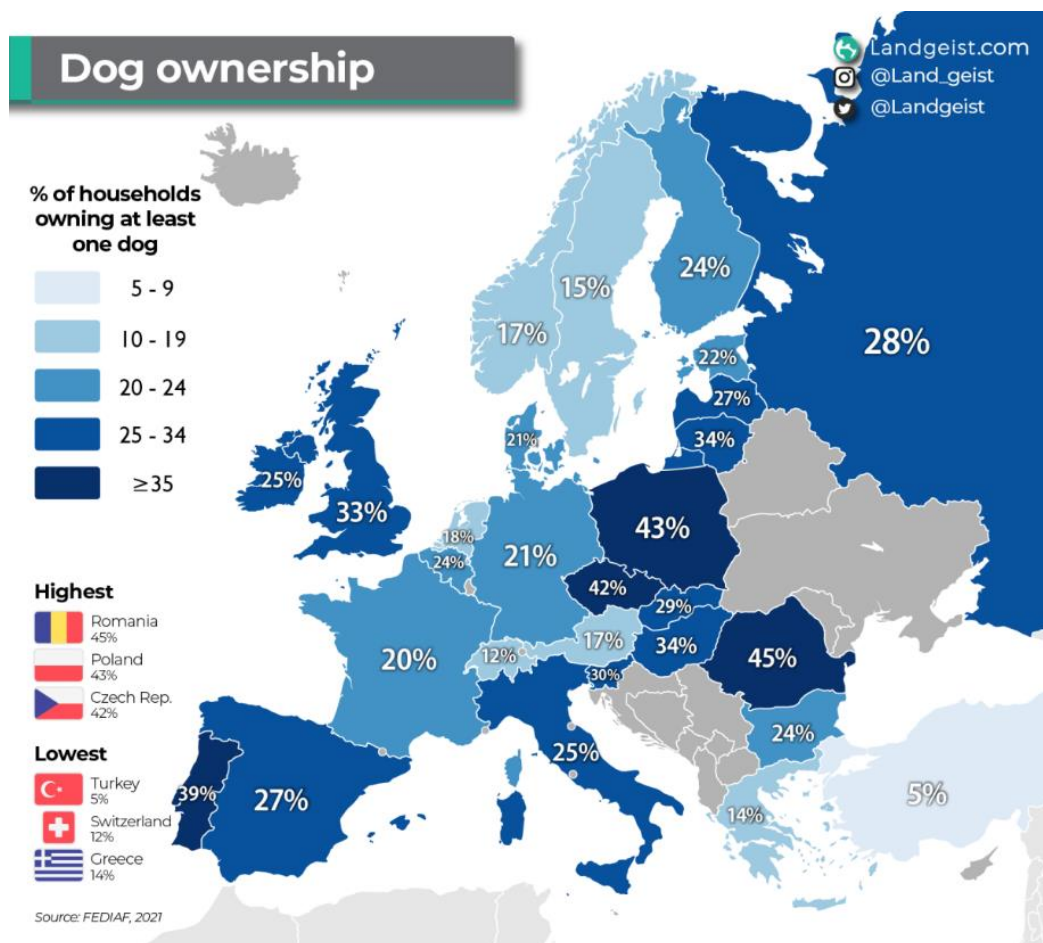
**All themes that will be later analysed are based both on the Eligible and Project Area (Pesaro-Urbino province and Split-Dalmatia County) since the offer to be analysed had to be wider to later make possible the creation of rich and attractive itineraries and packages. The aim is also to export the results of this project to a wider area than the project one.**



## 2. TRAVELERS WITH ANIMALS

### 2.1 DATA AND STATISTICS ON TRAVELER WITH ANIMALS

According to the European Pet Food Industry Federation (FEDIAF), around 90 million households in the EU own a pet (48%), with dogs and cats being the most common. The percentage of pet (not only dogs) owners varies from country to country, with countries like France, Spain and Italy having higher rates per ownership. This statistical research was last time held in Brussels, Belgium in June 2022 with estimated annual growth rate per 5.1%



Source: Dog Ownership, FEDIAF, 2021

GoPetFriendly estimates that the most popular keywords for Google search regarding pets is Travel and Tourism with significant 67.74% (2023)

According to TrustedHousesitters (October 2022), Europe’s most popular dog-friendly travel destinations are:



France	Paris	dog-friendly parks, pet-friendly cafes and accommodations. Moreover, the city's charming streets and parks make it an enjoyable destination to explore with pets.
Netherlands	Amsterdam	numerous pet-friendly hotels and cafes and the city's beautiful canals and parks provide a pleasant environment for pets and owners
Spain	Barcelona	a lot of pet-friendly beaches as well as hotels and cafes
Austria	Vienna	it is known for its pet-friendly culture with many green spaces and parks for perfect leisurely strolls with pets
Denmark	Copenhagen	many pet-friendly accommodations and green spaces
Croatia	Dubrovnik	a lot of pet-friendly beaches and accommodations
Italy	Tuscany	pet-friendly villas and countryside accommodations with a tranquil setting for pets and owners

*Source: TrustedHousesitters, 2022*

A study conducted by Booking.com in 2019 found that 56% of European travelers are willing to pay more for pet-friendly accommodations. 71% of pet owners consider their pets needs when choosing a place to stay.

According to Rovera research, 10% have hidden their dog in their luggage to sneak it into a hotel and 3% have tried to disguise their dog as a baby when boarding a plane.

The European Union introduced the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) in 2000, allowing pets to travel freely between EU member states with a valid pet passport.

According to EU law, dog has to be microchipped (in line with the technical requirements of Annex II of the EU Regulation on the movement of pets), has a clearly readable tattoo if applied before 3 July 2011, been vaccinated against rabies, had treatment against the tapeworm *Echinococcus multilocularis*, where your destination area is free from this tapeworm (Finland, Ireland, Malta, Norway and Northern Ireland), a valid European pet passport, when traveling



from an EU country or Northern Ireland to another EU country or Northern Ireland or an EU animal health certificate, when traveling from a non-EU country (Your Europe).

Over the past two years, the utilization of filters has been a significant increase, particularly in response to Booking.com's travel predictions aimed at promoting pet-friendly travel. The adoption of these filters has more than doubled since the commencement of travel restrictions during the pandemic of Covid-19. According to Singh, a representative from Booking.com, the pet-friendly filter now ranks as the third most frequently used filter in the facilities section, trailing only swimming pools and parking in popularity.

On a global level, according to Pet Travel Advisor and Condor statistics, it shows that the global pet industry will be worth over \$260 billion by 2025. It is estimated that 2 million pets travel commercially every year, 52% of owners surveyed said they only stay in pet-friendly establishments, 6% of pets are taken on airplanes every year, 27% of people said they want.

to see more pet-friendly hotels and resorts, 16% would also like to see pets in pubs, 15% would like to see more pet-friendly beaches, while 14% want more pet-friendly restaurants.

Condor survey also found out that 27% of dog owners plan one or two trips with pets this year and 37% plan a trip from 3 to 5, while 31% intend to travel with their family pet six or more times during the year.

According to Google, most popular searches when it comes to travel with animals are the following: dog friendly hotels, dog friendly accommodation, dog friendly beach near me, dog friendly lake near me, dog friendly vacations and dog friendly campsites.

Global Pet Research represents that there are 62 million pets in Italy whereas 8.2 million are dogs and 7.9 million are cats (2021), while according to Expat Croatia most recent data from 2023, approximately 60% of Croatian families own at least one pet: 41% of citizens own dogs and 29% own cats.



## 2.2 EUROPEAN OFFER FOR TRAVELERS WITH ANIMALS

Europe is considered a paradise for travelers seeking pet-friendly travel destinations and especially businesses. For a destination to be considered pet-friendly not only must the place be quite safe and in line with pets' needs, but also the offer of typical tourist services (accommodations, transports, restaurants, museums) must be prepared to welcome pets.

In Germany, France, Italy and Austria more than 40% of hotels accept pets. According to a survey by Taxi2airport.com (2020) on Booking.com data Europe has more than 100 thousand pet-friendly hotels. Italy wins the first place with more than 18thousands, but also Croatia gains the fourth place. Taxi2airport.com also had a look at the number of five-star hotels for each country in Europe to see where pet owners should travel to if they are looking for a luxurious experience. These are France (217 hotels), UK (166 hotels), Italy (157 hotels), Croatia (120 hotels) and Finland (112 hotels).

Country	No. of pet friendly hotels	5 star reviews	Country	No. of pet friendly hotels	5 star reviews
1 Italy	18,176	157	11 Czech Republic	3,408	54
2 Russia	10,831	61	12 Portugal	3,203	33
3 Poland	8,521	57	13 Belgium	3,030	21
4 Croatia	7,794	120	14 Bulgaria	2,970	24
5 Spain	6,945	77	15 Finland	2,925	112
6 France	6,224	217	16 Greece	2,733	64
7 Germany	4,737	135	17 United Kingdom	2,690	166
8 Austria	4,112	69	18 Serbia	2,638	6
9 Ukraine	3,792	22	19 Slovakia	2,493	9
10 Sweden	3,603	38	20 Romania	2,448	11

Source: Taxi2airport

Most of the trains in Europe allow pets, both large and small, creating a great sustainable opportunity for traveling. In Scandinavian countries' trains, there is even a designated seat for pets. Small dogs mostly travel for free, while usually





tickets for larger dogs have to be purchased, however, in the Netherlands there is an initiative that charges pets with cheap tickets for only 3,30 euros for the whole day duration. Trains that do not accept dogs are Eurostar trains, which operate between the United Kingdom and mainland Europe, connecting major cities like London, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels. This actually created a controversy because pets are allowed in both the United Kingdom and countries in the Western Europe in their local trains. In Italy, with the main train company Trenitalia, small pets travel for free in both First and Second class on all train categories, as well as in Executive, Business, Premium and Standard service levels (dimensions 70x30x50). Larger dogs pay half of the price of regular tickets. There is no limit of the size for large dogs as long as they remain on leashes and wear muzzles.

There are some excellent pet-friendly airlines in Europe.



Source: Pet-Friendly Airlines in Europe

If airlines are doing a great job in Europe to allow pets, airports have still to improve to reach USA standards. In some airports pets are not allowed to walk around but must be carried in a carrier bag. There are almost no pet relief areas





in European airports, with some exceptions in Helsinki and Istanbul Airports, Olbia Costa Smeralda Airport in Italy. However, grassed areas are more common. Other locations dedicated to transports are trying to improve their pet-friendliness. In the Port of Ancona, volunteers from the National Association of Firefighters-Riviera Del Conero Delegation have been assisting travelers with a pet since 2017, being the first Italian port to offer this kind of service. There is a dedicated desk at the port ticket office that connects travelers with volunteers and access to more details through the “Welcome to Ancona” app. Shuttle buses transport you to guided dog walks in the morning and afternoon, one exploring the historic town to Cardeto Park and the other in the port area ending at the red lantern. Additional services like veterinary care and dog sitting are available for a certain fee.

When it comes to restaurants, not all European countries are created equal when it comes to dog friendliness, while not uniformly regulated, most countries allow pets both indoors and outdoors, a policy determined by individual establishments.

GoPetFriendly blog also reports that significant consideration for destination when traveling with pets is the beach with 15.4%. Pet-friendly beaches are very common in European states having at disposal both beaches directly organized to welcome pets (dedicated seats, playgrounds, bowls, private sea) or free beaches where to enjoy the wilderness. Other examples of tourist services include Museums and tourist attractions. A huge number of museums around Europe have started to offer daycare services for dogs and other four-legged companions. The Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia (MUVE), for example, which manages Venice's eleven municipal museums, has teamed up with BauAdvisor to offer a dog-sitting service for art lovers. To do this, they must book a slot on the BauAdvisor website specifying the day and time of their visit to the museum of their choice.



## 3. VISUALLY IMPAIRED TRAVELERS

### 3.1. INTRO: EUROPEAN REGULATIONS AND STATE OF THE ART IN EUROPE

Visually impaired people, also referred to as blind or visually challenged individuals, are those who experience significant visual impairment that cannot be corrected through conventional means, such as glasses or contact lenses.

CATEGORIES
<i>Legally Blind: individuals whose visual acuity is 20/200 or worse in their better eye with the best possible correction.</i>
<i>Low Vision: People with low vision have some degree of usable vision, but it is not sufficient for them to perform everyday tasks without assistance or adaptive aids. This category encompasses a wide range of visual impairments, from having difficulty reading small print to perceiving only light and shadows.</i>
<i>Partially Sighted: this category includes individuals who have better visual acuity but still face significant challenges in daily activities that require vision.</i>
<i>Totally Blind: individuals in this category have no functional vision and rely entirely on non-visual techniques, such as braille and auditory cues</i>
<i>Congenital Blindness: some people are born blind due to conditions such as genetic factors or developmental issues during pregnancy. They have never had visual experiences.</i>
<i>Acquired Blindness: This refers to individuals who lose their sight later in life due to various factors, such as injuries or medical conditions.</i>
<i>Deafblindness: individuals who possess both hearing and vision impairments</i>

*Source: Information gathered from News-Medical.com*

According to data from the World Health Organization, 285 million people are visually impaired due to various cases; 39 million of them are blind (2023). Furthermore, the dominant demographic consists of individuals above 50 years old. The rise in visual impairment cases is connected to the aging populace. Moreover, there exist around 0.5 to 1 billion eye conditions that are treatable or preventable at the very least. In Europe, it is estimated that there are over 30 million blind and partially sighted persons, constituting an average of 1 in 30 Europeans who experience sight loss (European Blind Union, 2023). According to the British Journal of Ophthalmology, childhood blindness in Europe is between 0.1 and 0.41 per 1000 children (British Journal of Ophthalmology, 2023).



Traveling is indeed an incredibly meaningful and enriching experience for people of all abilities, including visually impaired individuals. It offers opportunities for personal growth, cultural understanding, expansion of horizons and creation of lasting memories. For visually impaired individuals, travel can be especially significant as it allows them to engage with the world in a unique way through the exploration of new places, interaction with different cultures and immersion in diverse sensory experiences. Unfortunately, 40% (individuals and groups) do not go on holidays because of the lack of assistance or care (European Network for Accessible Tourism). In order to understand the position of visually impaired people in the tourism market, it is not crucial to know what percentage this group represents, but rather understand the consequences and impact of visual impairment on their lives and participation in tourism (Šintáková, Lasisi, 2020). UNWTO estimates show the EU's potential disability travel market is 80-130 million, including seniors. As the population ages, the number of disabled travelers is rising, with 70% in the EU capable of traveling (Services and facilities for Accessible Tourism in Europe).

Data obtained from Quora and Reddit forum demonstrates the travel activities preferences of visually impaired people when choosing to travel. The preference of visually impaired travelers, gleaned from over 200 responses across Quora and Reddit forums, reveal a clear inclination towards engaging in activities that align with their abilities. A predominant segment with more than 100 responders expressing a preference for immersive natural and outdoor experiences. Notably, they enjoy engaging in things they can do, particularly adrenaline-inducing ones. Moreover, approximately half of the participants expressed a desire to incorporate water-based activities gravitating toward beach destinations. This inclination also underscores their desire for tactile engagement. Equally compelling were the sentiments shared by 72 individuals, emphasizing the joy derived from cultural immersion and culinary exploration. This group identified the significance of sensory experiences, showcasing how tactile exploration and indulging in novel flavors amplify their travel enjoyment. Delving further into their preferences, 55 respondents expressed an affinity for visiting religious sites and embarking on pilgrimages. While a smaller portion of participants mentioned activities like attending workshops, exploring zoo parks

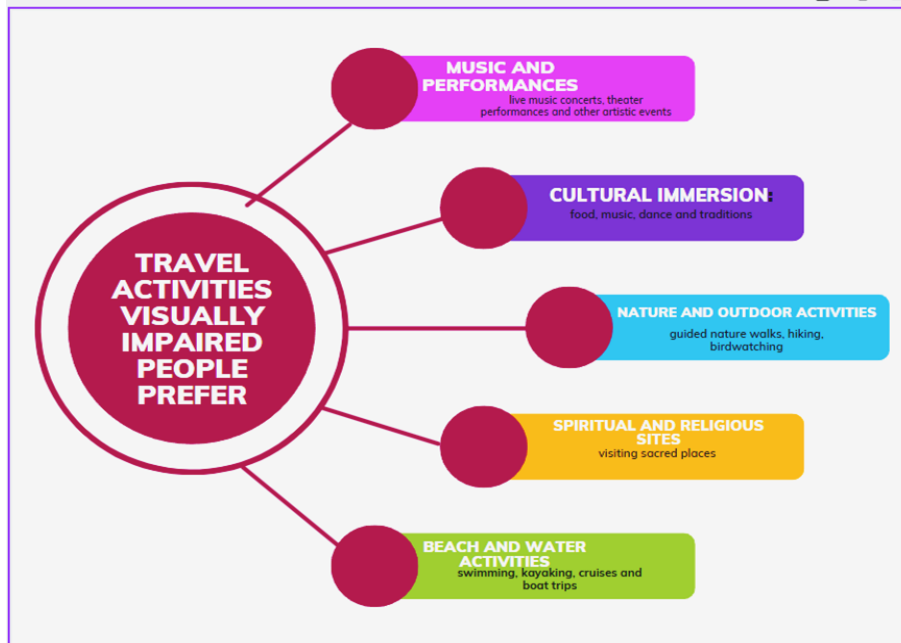


and experiencing nightlife, these responses underscore the diverse range of interests within the visually impaired travel community.

- **Cultural Immersion:** engaging with local cultures through food, music, dance and traditions provides a multisensory experience
- **Tactile Exploration:** activities that involve touching and feeling, such as exploring historic buildings, sculptures and tactile art installations, can provide a deeper connection to the surroundings.
- **Nature and Outdoor Adventures:** outdoor activities like guided nature walks, hiking, birdwatching and even more extreme experiences like zip-lining or bungee jumping, where the focus shifts to the sounds, textures and sensations of the environment.
- **Culinary Experiences:** exploring local cuisine through tasting tours, cooking classes and food markets allows visually impaired individuals to engage their sense of taste and smell
- **Music and Performances:** attending live music concerts, theater performances and other artistic events can be a powerful way for visually impaired travelers to connect with the emotions and atmospheres created by sound.
- **Spiritual and Religious Sites:** visiting sacred places and participating in rituals provides a spiritual connection that transcends visual experiences.
- **Hands-On Workshops:** participating in workshops like pottery, crafts or cooking can provide a tactile and interactive way to learn about local traditions.
- **Beach and Water Activities:** enjoying the sound of waves, the feel of sand and participating in water-based activities like swimming or kayaking



can create relaxing and enjoyable experiences. Also, cruises and boat trips offer opportunities for relaxation



EU commitments, like the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Agreement for Human Rights, uphold equality and protection against discrimination. The European Union’s commitment to ensuring equality and protection against discrimination is enshrined in both the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Agreement for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; they emphasize that individuals with disabilities should have access to leisure, travel and tourism opportunities (Ability Advisor).

Academic Network of European Disability Network showcases other important laws and regulations related to accessible tourism: “Directive 95/16/EC sets requirements relating to the disability accessibility of lifts. In all of the responses from EU Member States, with the exception of Hungary there were national specific requirements for accessibility for government building”...“A very similar picture is evident for specific accessibility requirements relating to schools or



educational facilities, for hospitals or medical facilities and for leisure and sporting facilities open to the public (both public and private), as the following tables indicate” (Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) and University of Leeds, 2013).

“The Air Passengers’ Rights Regulation (1107/2006) protects passengers with reduced mobility against denied boarding on the ground of reduced mobility or disability, provides passengers with the right to receive comprehensive assistance by 25 Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) – VT/2007/005 qualified personnel, and stipulates compensatory measures for lost or damaged mobility equipment and assistive devices. The Regulation grants passengers the right to receive essential information at airports and onboard aircrafts in accessible formats. The Regulation also provides for a complaints mechanism. The Regulations on the rights of rail passengers (Regulation 1370/2007 and Regulation 1371/2007) include a chapter on the specific rights of persons with reduced mobility, guaranteeing rights similar to the rights provided in the Air Passengers’ Rights Regulation.” ...A fine (from 500 to 2500 euros) is applicable if a guide dog is denied access on public transport and buildings open to public”(Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) and University of Leeds, 2013).

Also, according to European Network for Accessible Tourism, it is stated that; “Thanks to the passing in September 2007 of the proposed Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council, on the rights and obligations of international railway passengers (Third Railway package - [COM (2004) 143 final] (for the full text: [http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/es/com/2004/com2004\\_0143es01.pdf](http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/es/com/2004/com2004_0143es01.pdf)), people with reduced mobility will have the next rights: Any person with reduced mobility will have the right to purchase a ticket and a to make a reservation for an international journey leaving the main railway station. The station manager will be responsible for providing the necessary assistance for the boarding, the transfer to a shuttle service and the disembarkation of passengers. The



passengers will have the right to request the assistance of the railway company or operator on board or during boarding or disembarking, as long as they have previously notified their particular needs (at least 24h. before departure)" (Accessible Tourism).

The Italian Railways (FS) signed the IUR Agreement on Rail Transport for Blind People and their Guide issued in 1997 and amended in 2005. Visually impaired people residing in and traveling to any of the countries who signed this Agreement are entitled to a free ticket for their guide or guide dog provided that the return ticket is purchased in the country where the disability card was issued."According to the report, there are around 1000 guide dogs in Italy (European Blind Union).

As EBU reported, "Blind and partially sighted persons are able to fly throughout Europe with their guide dog with them, thanks to Regulation EC1107/2006 which concerns the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when traveling by air. ECAC is the European enforcement body for the regulation, along with the national enforcement bodies of each country" (European Blind Union). Guide dogs and assistance dogs can fly free in the cabin with their handlers, accompanied by a pet passport and identification card. Booking processes differ among airlines, (EasyJet allows online booking for guide dogs, whereas Ryanair allows only 4 guide dogs per one trip). Also, some countries have certain specific requirements, for example Malta, Finland, Ireland and the UK mandate recent worming treatment for dogs entering, except between these 4 countries.

According to EU Law regulations, traveling with a guide dog is allowed if the following requirements are met: "1. A microchip in your Service Dog2. Rabies vaccinations3. Blood Work 4.Treated for ticks, fleas, and worms" (Food Safety).

In Croatia, the legislative framework for visually impaired travelers encompasses a wide range of regularities such as anti-discrimination laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability, including visual impairment, alongside accessibility regulations requiring public places, transportation and services to



cater to people with disabilities. It is recommended that accessible signage, tactile markers, audio announcements and assistance services in public transport are installed as well as ensuring accessibility of information and communication through accessible websites and apps. “Accessibility of information on part of the Croatian cultural heritage for the general public, including persons with disabilities, is ensured through the national digitisation programme, “Croatian Cultural Heritage” (CRPD/C/HRV/1, paragraph 201). In 2008, a new permanent exhibition was opened in the Typhlological Museum, a national specialized museum adapted to persons with disabilities (the catalog of the permanent exhibition and the legends were produced in Braille, raised-relief maps, and a computer adapted for blind persons is available) (CRPD/C/HRV/1, paragraph 203). The Croatian Museum Council has set standards for the systematic regulation of access to museums and galleries (CRPD/C/HRV/1, paragraph 204).<sup>42</sup> Since 2008, the Ministry of Tourism has conducted a programme awarding non-repayable funds, entitled Tourism without Barriers, which encourages investments in public tourism infrastructure designed for persons with disabilities and reduced mobility (adapted access paths to tourist hospitality and other facilities, lifts for entering the sea, access ramps, adapted public toilets...) (CRPD/C/HRV/1, paragraph 208). Croatia subsidizes sporting activities for persons with disabilities, and athletes with disabilities receive the same awards for medals won at international competitions like the Paralympic Games as nondisabled athletes” (Tatic, Council of Europe).

Interestingly, as reported by Academic Network of European disabilities expats, Croatia is among the 8 EU countries that have implemented accessibility requirements for taxi booking services under the legislative framework. This legislation is essential for promoting accessible tourism.

According to the European Blind Union, “The Croatian Railways (HZ) signed the IUR Agreement on Rail Transport for Blind People and their Guide issued in 1997 and amended in 2005. Visually impaired people residing in and travelling to any of the countries who signed this Agreement are entitled to a free ticket for their





guide or guide dog provided that the return ticket is purchased in the country where the disability card was issued”

The Croatian government also established that ferry tickets for state level are free of charge for people with visual impairment.

According to the European Parliament and regulations concerning guide dogs in Croatia, it is said that: “Zakon o Kretanju Slijepa osobe uz pomoc psa vodica (Official Gazette no. 131/1998) - Law on Movement of visually impaired persons with the help of a guide dog, is the legal instrument that regulates the access right of guide dogs for blind persons into buildings. More precisely, Article 6 of the mentioned Law stipulates the following: (1) A blind person with a guide dog has a right of access to public places such as: offices, hotels, restaurants, banks, post offices, theaters, concert halls, sports facilities, markets, shops, schools, colleges and the like. (2) A blind person with a guide dog has a right to enter and use the waiting room of medical facilities and pharmacy.” Duncan, Guide Dogs in the EU.

According to information from the European Blind Union, the legal framework in Italy provides robust support for activities aimed at improving accessibility and inclusivity for visually impaired people.

“Articles 26 to 28 of law 104/92 are focused on mobility as well as on collective and individual transport. Pursuant to these articles, Regions are called to regulate the modalities according to which Municipalities prepare their actions to allow persons with disabilities to circulate freely on the territory by using public transport the same way as the other citizens do.’

“ Law No 37 of 14 February 1974 (<http://www.handylex.org/stato/l140274.shtml> (External link) ) guide dogs are allowed on means of transport free of charge. A subsection was added by law No 376 of 25 August 1988 providing for guide dogs to be allowed into all public buildings and business/commercial concerns open to the public (including hotels, restaurants, shops etc.) According to Law 60 of 8 February 2006 (<http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/06060l.htm> ) a fine (from



500 to 2500 euros) is applicable if a guide dog is denied access. The guide dog must be adequately trained and wear a muzzle in the cases identified within the above-mentioned Law 60/2006, paragraph 4.”

Law No. 37 of 14 February 1974 provides for guide dogs to be allowed free of charge on public transport, as well as to be allowed into all public facilities.” “Guidelines for the elimination of architectonic barriers in cultural sites (2008) have been drafted by the Commission for the analysis of disability-related problems, in particular regarding the field of cultural heritage and activities, since its creation in 2007: these guidelines consider sensorial barriers as well and provide, in the absence of specific legal reference, more design-oriented suggestions. (European Blind Union)

## Transportation

Transportation is the most important sector when considering traveling accounting for 59.8% (following sight participate 24.6% and accommodation 15.6%) (Zadeh, 2020).

According to European Network for Accessible Tourism, it is estimated that more than 27% of the European population, the availability of accessible venues and services is an essential factor in deciding where to go and what to book (Accessible Tourism in Europe).

According to the Interreg Danube Transnational Program, in Europe, there are over 30 million blind and partially sighted people who cannot travel independently as more than 96% of the European transport system, especially in the Danube Region, is still not fully accessible to people with visual impairments (Danube Transnational Programme).

Transportation for visually impaired travelers requires careful planning and considerations to ensure a safe and enjoyable journey. Which transport they will choose is crucial factor since ResearchGate illustrates that 47% of visually impaired people chose to walk within 10 min, 25% of them chose to walk within



10 to 20 min, 13% of them chose to walk within 20 to 30 min, 9% of them chose to walk within 30 to 60 min, 9% of them chose to walk within 60 min or more. According to relevant studies, the average walking speed of visually impaired people is approximately 0.72 m/s [27], and the travel distance was calculated based on their walking (Liu, Zhang, Zeng & Fan 2019).

Travel time	<10 min	10–20 min	20–30 min	30–60 min	>60 min
Average travel distance	<432 m	432–864 m	864–1296 m	1296–2592 m	>2592 m
Maximum travel distance	<666 m	666–1332 m	1332–1998 m	1998–3996 m	>3996 m
Minimum travel distance	<288 m	288–576 m	576–864 m	864–1728 m	>1728 m

Travel distance for visually impaired people.

Source: Analysis and Optimization Strategy of Travel System for Urban Visually Impaired People (2019)

<b>Air Travel</b>	Most airports have assistance services for visually impaired passengers. These services include escorting through security, providing boarding assistance and offering information about gate changes. Passengers should inform airlines ahead about visual impairment when booking tickets
<b>Train Travel</b>	Many train stations in Europe offer accessible features such as tactile strips, audible announcements and trained staff to assist passengers.
<b>Bus and Public Transportation</b>	There are accessibility features such as audio announcements and priority seating
<b>Cruise and Ships</b>	Many cruise lines have accommodations for visually impaired passengers, such as braille materials and accessible cabins.
<b>Taxi</b>	Most taxis and ride-sharing services offer accessible vehicles equipped with features like ramps and tactile markets

A virtuous example in the field of transportation is Gatwick Airport which was declared by EBU The 2019 Accessible Airport Award Winner, praised for its commitment to provide an equal travel experience to all its passengers



(European Blind Union). The airport introduced the Hidden Disability Lanyard that aims to aid passengers with concealed disabilities and is obtained free of charge from Gatwick's assistance desk. It has been reported that since it was launched, the airport has garnered over 100.000 requests (Gatwick airport). Other European airports praised for good practice: ANA Aeroportos de Portugal, Athens International Airport S.A., Copenhagen Airport, Malaga-Costa del Sol Airport, Warsaw Chopin Airport, Vienna Airport. For instance, in Portugal, the New Call Points with large buttons for easy activation are introduced and a dog relief area for assistance animals in Copenhagen. Malaga Airport implemented an indoor guidance project for blind or partially sighted passengers using NaviLens technology that involves color markers for long-distance reading, providing information without headphones.

Trenitalia offers assistance for travelers with disabilities through Sala Blu (which means Blue Room or Blue Hall in Italian). There are Sala Blu facilities at 14 train stations, and these manage a circuit of 270 stations throughout the country for increased access through coordinated services (ItaliaRail).

Netherlands has one of the most accessible railway networks in the world: from apps that read what's on the signs to staff who meet you at the door. According to BBC news, guiding strips have been installed in over 400 train stations (over 90 kilometers) (Rodrigues, 2021).

Regarding public transport, Sweden's public transportation systems have implemented tactile paths and guidance features in subway stations to aid visually impaired travelers in navigating through the station like locating entrances, exits, platforms and other key areas. Moreover, in Germany, in Munich, the public transportation system features a "Blindenleitsystem" (blind guidance system). This includes tactile paths and audible signals at crossings to assist visually impaired pedestrians in navigating busy areas.

Even if some virtuous examples can be mentioned, some improvements still need to be done. according to Europa.eu and Eurocities there are some things which should be considered for improving transportation systems in Europe



Accessible Infrastructure	tactile paving, audible announcements and clear signage
Information Accessibility	information in multiple formats, including braille, large print and digital formats compatible with screen readers. Information should be clear and well-paced
Assistance Services	train staff to effectively assist passengers, offering guidance and information when needed. Also, establishing clear protocols that ensure a reliable and efficient process
Digital Solutions	developing mobile apps with features like real-time navigation, live updates and station information accessible to screen readers. Ticket purchasing and travel planning platforms should be fully accessible online
Collaboration with Organizations	it is important to partner with disability advocacy groups to gather insights, feedback and recommendations to improve accessibility
Mobility Aids	designating areas for guide dog relief and ensuring the comfort and needs of assistance animals. Also, providing a storage space for white canes and other mobility aids on vehicles

## Accommodation

According to the European Network for Accessible Tourism, for over 27% of Europeans, the availability of accessible venues and services significantly influences their destination choices and booking decisions. Research highlights that disabled individuals often encounter barriers that limit their travel experiences both domestically and internationally, with 6.5% of accommodation providers lacking suitable facilities. This issue isn't isolated; a weak link in the accessibility chain, like steps at a hotel entrance, can disrupt the entire travel



experience for someone who has reserved an accessible room (Services and facilities for Accessible Tourism in Europe). In 2019, as Skift research reported, Europe hosted around 219 thousand hotel establishments, underscoring the importance of enhancing accessibility for a more inclusive travel industry (Skift Research, 2022). According to Trip Advisor, only 440 out of 3,261 hotels are accessible to visually-impaired and disabled persons, accounting for only 13,47 %. Recent research by Handiscover reveals that nearly a third (32%) of Europeans have found hotels unable to meet their accessibility requirements (Mynewsdesk, 2021).

An obstacle that must be overcome, for clients but also for the offer: a US market study by Harris Interactive/Open Doors Organization shows that increased accessible travel options have resulted in disabled travelers spending over 13 billion dollars annually on travel-related services, including over 17 million on hotel stays (CBI).

As for transportation sector, also for accommodation there is some space for improvement. According to Inclusive City Market, Europa.eu, and European Network for Accessible Tourism there are important accommodation factors to be considered for visually impaired people.

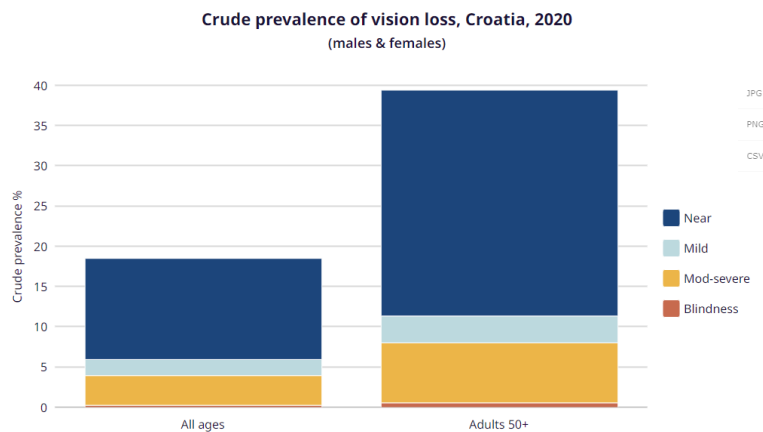
Physical Accessibility	features like ramps, wide doorways and elevators that accommodate guide dogs and mobility aids
Tactile Signage	braille signage for room numbers, elevator buttons, tactile maps
Lighting and Contrast	adequate and well-distributed lighting in common areas and rooms
Furniture Layout	arrangement of furniture in a way that avoids obstacles and clutter in walkways
Safety Features	installment of safety measures like handrails in hallways and bathrooms to help guests navigate spaces independently
Communication	train staff should effectively communicate with visually impaired

	guests and offer assistance when needed
Service Animal Policies	designated relief areas and facilities for guide dogs
Accessible Technology	screen readers, accessible TV features,..
Accessible Bathrooms	features like grab bars, non-slip flooring and raised toilet seat

### Croatia

IAPB Vision Atlas statistics reported that Croatia estimated 780,000 people with vision loss. Of these, 12,000 people were blind (The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, 2021). Minister of the conference ‘Tourism for All’ Nikolina Brnjac said that the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the tourism sector have so far made certain progress in inclusiveness, but still a lot of effort is needed to remove all obstacles.

There are currently 59 guide dog users in Croatia with over 110 of dogs trained until now is according to European Blind Union.

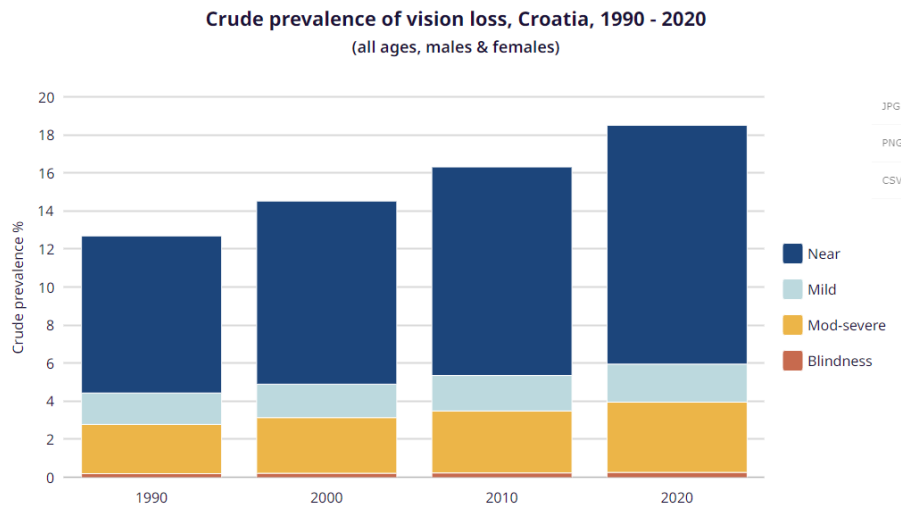


Source: Data from VLEG/GBD 2020 model, accessed via the IAPB Vision Atlas

The picture generated from IAPB Vision Atlas illustrates the percentage of crude prevalence of vision loss in Croatia in 2020 based on all ages and adults +50. It is divided in 4 categories ranging from complete blindness (indicated with red



color), mod-severe (yellow), mild (light blue) and near (dark blue). The graphic demonstrates that the crude prevalence of vision less is doubled for adults +50, showcasing that visual impairment prevails to this age group of people.



Source: Data from VLEG/GBD 2020 model, accessed via the IAPB Vision Atlas

The second picture is also derived from IAPB Vision Atlas, highlighting the same principle, but based on the year, respectively 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020. It shows that there is an equal increase in the percentage of visual impairment every 10 years.

According to the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Culture in Croatia funds programs like the Round Table for special needs library services and backs the Croatian Library for the Blind, promoting accessibility and publishing efforts; The Ministry of Culture continually supports and finances library programmes aimed at promoting and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities, for example the Round table for library services for persons with special needs, and translating and publishing electronic issues of the IFLA Guidelines for easy-to read materials (revised issue from 2010). The Ministry of Culture also regularly finances the Croatian Library for the Blind by providing support for performing regular library and publishing activities and by investing in equipment and premises (CRPD/C/HRV/1, paragraph 205) (Tatic, 2015).





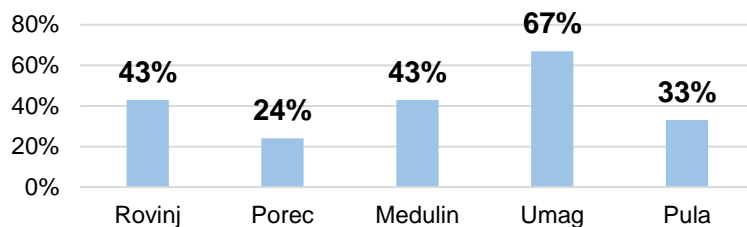
Ministry of Sport and Tourism in Croatia has implemented a number of initiatives for inclusive tourism;

- Handbook: “Care of a guest with disabilities” (Priručnik Briga o gostu s invaliditetom) a collaborative project by Zagreb’s education centers produces a guide for accommodating diverse disabilities including visual impairments.
- “Project of the Society of Tourist Guides in Pula - Development of CSOs through accessible forms of tourism - strengthening the competencies of tourist guides in the field of inclusive tourism and networking of various civil society organizations” (Projekt Društva turističkih vodiča Pule - Razvoj OCD-a kroz pristupačne oblike turizma - jačanje kompetencija turističkih vodiča u području inkluzivnog turizma i umrežavanju različitih organizacija civilnog društva). This project addresses gaps in disability-friendly facilities and fosters Pula’s tourist guides partnership with the blind association to enhance inclusivity and introduce innovative features like a promenade for visually impaired tourists.
- “The project of the Association of Tourist Guides “Mihovil” Šibenik - “Tourism accessible to all” (Projekt Udruge turističkih vodiča “Mihovil” Šibenik - „Turizam dostupan svima” Tourist Guides ‘Mihovil’) teams up with a disability organization to educate guides on various disabilities and create tactile planes, promoting easier interaction and accessibility

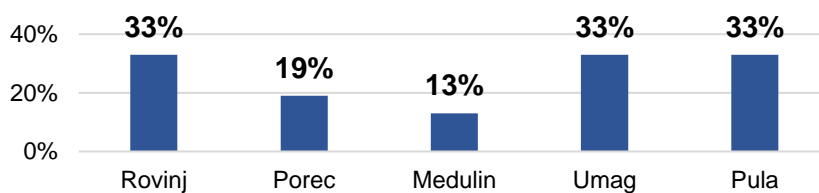
In the graphics below, gathered from the research conducted by Damir Popovic in 2018, we can find the percentage of accommodations-hotels, beaches, museums/galleries and restaurants accessible and adequate to disabled people estimated in 5 Croatian cities.



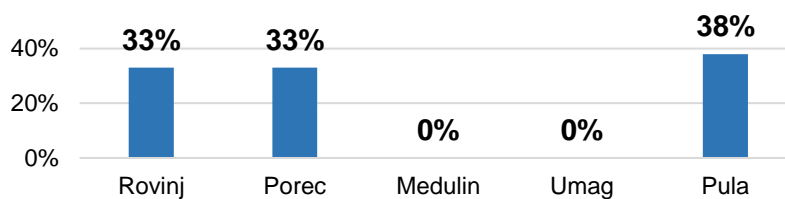
### Hotels



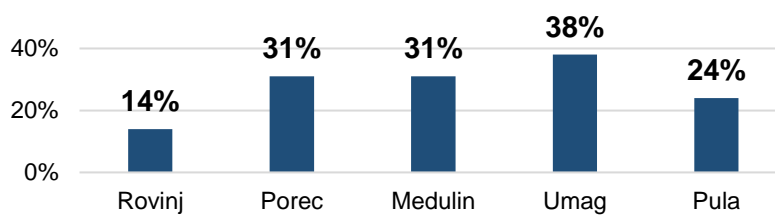
### Beaches



### Culture: museums and galleries



### Restaurants

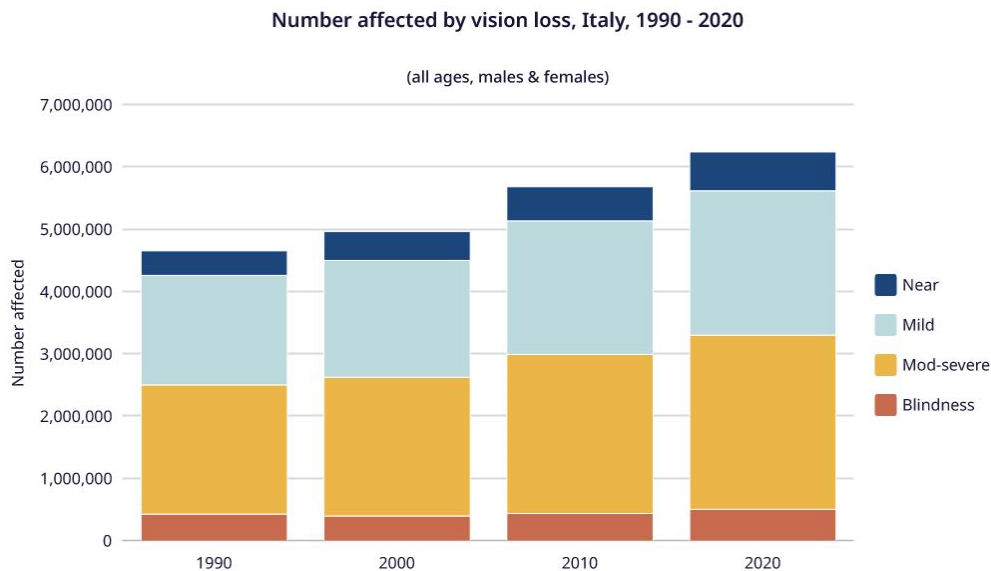


According to this data, Umag leads in accessible hotel options (67%) and restaurant accessibility (38%) out of the other four. Beach accessibility is tied at 33% for Umag, Pula and Rovinj. For cultural activities, Pula shines with 38% of museums and galleries adopted (Popovic, 2018).

## Italy

According to which AtlasVision, the number of visually impaired people in Italy (2020) amounts to 6.2 million, of 510,000 are completely blind. According to European Blind Union estimates, around 1000 guide dogs are currently in service in the country.

The graph below demonstrates that there is an equal increase every 10 year in the number of visually impaired people in Italy, ranging from complete blindness to mild- and near- conditions.



Source: Data from VLEG/GBD 2020 model, accessed via the IAPB Vision Atlas

In March 2023 a bill has been proposed to the Italian Parliament calling for a more inclusive and accessible tourism and for more opportunities for disabled people to participate in cultural and touristic activities, mainly focusing on totally accessible accommodations facilities and public transportation to fully enjoy



travel opportunities. The bill calls for an increase in numbers of rooms accessible to people with different kinds of disabilities, maps in braille, the acceptance of service dogs, and assistance by personnel, implying proper preparation of the staff.

According to ISTAT data, at the moment there are only 33.000 accommodations properly equipped to welcome visually impaired guests. In order to offer an innovative solution that would let visually impaired people to experience their stay in any accommodation without issues, Village for all and La Girobussola Association created the 'Welcome kit for accessible hospitality'. The kit is a project containing informative materials (maps, menus, texts) in braille useful in terms of mobility and services about the accommodation, the surrounding area, the directory. This project has been tested in the Eligible Area, in Ferrara.

Another Italian enterprise, REMOOVE, has been working on tourism projects and accessible and inclusive travel applying hearing methods, design thinking, participative planning and universal design. Their aim is to maximize usability, enjoyment and accessibility of the environment, the services and events, adapting them to everyone's capacities and needs.

A study by money.co.uk listed three Italian cities in their accessible cities ranking, made on factors such as wheelchair accessibility at hotels, restaurants, things to do, parking, facilities for visually impaired.



Source: Comune di Venezia; Macerata Culture

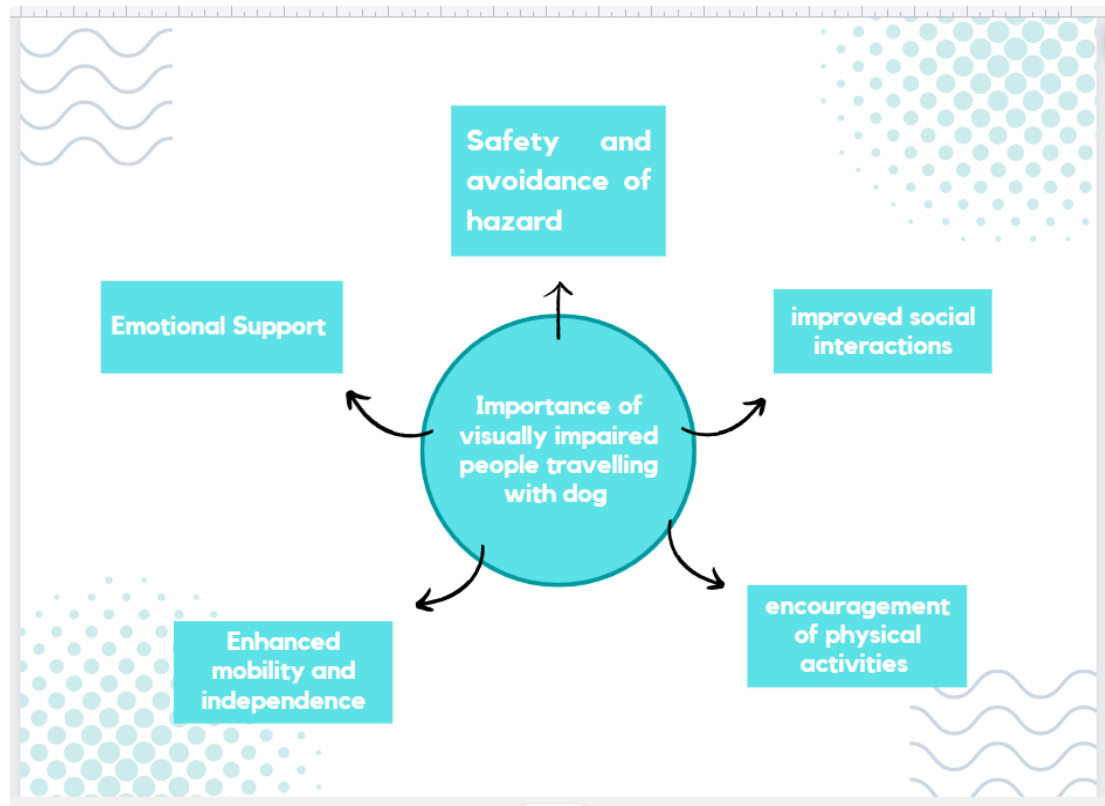


Venice, a city comprising more than 120 islands, boasts a 14 km network of accessible walking paths that enable individuals with disabilities to explore various parts of the city. The remaining areas not accessible by foot are seamlessly connected through the public navigation system.

In recent years, several cities in Emilia-Romagna have been diligently working towards enhancing accessibility for all, ensuring that tourists can enjoy their visit without hindrances. In art cities, like Ferrara, the majority of monuments and public transportation services are already accommodating to people with disabilities, and in Bologna, the BOforAll app offers guidance for navigating the city. Similar initiatives are also in place in Parma, Piacenza, Ravenna, and Comacchio. Along the riviera, numerous beaches and accommodations have been equipped for accessibility, thanks to the Best project, with Cesenatico, Cervia, Rimini, and Punta Marina being notable examples. In the Marche region, the “Marche for all” project combines nature, culture and inclusivity, making the region’s natural heritage accessible to all with the help of trained excursionist guides, all free of charge. In Apulia, the C.Os.T.A. project has been recently launched, promoting a more inclusive tourism aimed at facilitating the presence of people with disabilities and their companions, the realization of infrastructure and accessible services, the advertising of accessible tourism, and its promotion also through working stages for people with disabilities.



### 3.2 IMPORTANCE FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE TO TRAVEL WITH DOGS



Sight is a powerful sense that allows people to perceive the world in all its features and navigate one's surroundings. People who are visually impaired are influenced by the lack of this sense every day, being affected mainly in their mobility and independence. In this context, assistance dogs emerge as extraordinary companions that open up a world of possibilities for individuals with visual impairments. Assistance dogs are highly trained and devoted animals that play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of life of their handlers, increasing confidence and mobility, empowering them to work, engage in social and recreational activities, and, more and more frequently, travel, all with a newfound sense of confidence and freedom.

The training process for guide dogs is a meticulously designed journey, which can span several months to a year. These remarkable animals undergo

extensive and specialized training, which includes learning commands and cues that are essential for the safety and mobility of their visually impaired handlers, as well as learning how to remain totally unbothered by their surroundings during their work, only focusing on helping their handler. During training, guide dogs are exposed to various real-world scenarios, ensuring they can confidently lead their owners through busy streets, crowded public spaces, and unexpected obstacles. This intricate training process highlights the dedication of guide dog organizations and the incredible adaptability and intelligence of these animals. While others find that access to public spaces is improved with the acquisition of a guide dog, people with visual impairments periodically experience additional barriers when attempting to enter some pubs, hotels, or public transport, suggesting a lack of understanding of guide dogs' owners' rights to reasonable accommodation. Thus, while a guide dog can assist in overcoming some barriers of vision impairment, it might also create additional constraints related to discrimination, as well as care and welfare concerns. (Travelling with a Guide Dog: Experiences of People with Vision Impairment, Jillian Rickly et al., 2021) In fact, despite the existing legal framework that supports the rights of guide dog users, challenges and discrimination still persist. This not only poses practical obstacles but also emotional distress. Such experiences can leave individuals feeling excluded and isolated, despite their legal protections. Addressing these issues is crucial to fostering a more inclusive society and tourism industry.

The importance of traveling with assistance dogs for visually impaired individuals is underscored by the legal framework that supports their inclusion in the tourism sector, as seen in Italy and Croatia. In Italy, the laws governing assistance dogs (37/1974, 376/1988, 60/2006), not only emphasize the right of visually impaired individuals to be accompanied by their guide dogs in various public spaces but also recognize the pivotal role these dogs play in facilitating independent travel. Similarly, in Croatia, the "Law on the use of assistance dog" (2019) highlights the importance of assistance dogs for those with visual impairments, ensuring their equal access to the country's vibrant tourism industry. These legal provisions ensure inclusivity, promote a more accessible



and welcoming environment for visually impaired travellers and their companions, that offer interconnected advantages such as mobility, safety, social connection, physical activity, and emotional support, making them invaluable companions for visually impaired travellers and enhancing their overall travel experience.

**Enhanced mobility** and independence: guide dogs are specifically trained to navigate obstacles, cross streets, and guide their handlers safely through various environments while retaining a behavior unbothered by external distractions. It is reported that increased mobility and independence can significantly empower and improve the quality of life for visually impaired individuals, allowing them to explore new places with ease and confidence.

**Safety and avoidance of hazards:** (BetterHealth Channel): guide dogs help visually impaired people to travel safely and confidently assisting them with navigation, finding objects, and are trained to identify and alert their handlers to potential dangers such as oncoming traffic, curbs, stairs, and other obstacles, stopping or holding back their holder while leading them along the safer route to destination. This heightened awareness of hazards can prevent accidents and injuries. In public spaces such as malls, airports and train stations, guide dogs help avoid obstacles, crowded areas and moving vehicles. In emergency situations, such as fires or evacuations, guide dogs also play a crucial role as they navigate escape routes, locate exits and evacuate dangerous areas. They can also alert potential dangers such as slippery surfaces, low-hanging obstacles or changes in elevations.

**Improved social interactions:** (Rickly J. M., Halpern N., Hansen M., Welsman J., Travelling with a guide dog: Confidence, constraints and affective qualities of the human-guide dog relationship, Tourism Management, 2022) as reported in the text, guide dogs attract attention and curiosity from people in the community.





Passersby often stop to ask about the dog, its training, role, providing an opportunity for individuals with visual impairments to engage in conversations with strangers, fostering social interactions. Having a guide dog can make people feel more comfortable in situations in which otherwise some could feel tiring or unable to participate in. Guide dogs indeed serve as natural icebreakers in social situations, since having them can make one appear more approachable to others. Moreover, conversations about guide dogs often lead to discussions about dogs in general, pets and animal welfare. These topics provide a common group for individuals with visual impairments to connect with others who share similar interests, fostering improved social interactions between their handlers and fellow travellers and locals, thereby enriching cultural exchange and one's travel experience.

**Encouragement of physical activity:** a 2019 study by the University of Liverpool revealed that dog owners are about four times more likely than other people to meet today's physical activity guidelines, and that having a dog can strongly influence how much people exercise. As travelling often involves walking and engaging in some form of physical activity, having a guide dog might encourage visually impaired travellers to stay active, participate more in activities, and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

**Emotional Support** (Mapleservices.com): guide dogs are constant companions, offering a strong and dependable presence in the lives of visual impaired people. The companionship can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. It can also reduce stress and anxiety since the interaction with a dog can be calming and provide a sense of emotional stability, and assistance dogs are specifically trained to do so, providing comfort to their handlers in stressful situations or during panic attacks. Dogs do not judge or discriminate based on a person's visual impairment, circumstances, or appearance. Research has shown that owning a dog can reduce symptoms of depression and improve overall mental health. The dog's presence can be "grounding and reassuring".



### 3.3 MAIN OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED WHILE TRAVELLING

From the information gathered from the articles: *Traveling with a Guide Dog: Experiences of People with Vision Impairment* (Rickly, J.M.; Halpern, N.; Hansen, M.; Welsman, J) and *Travel Motivation and Barriers to Travel for People with Visual Impairments* (Šintáková O.T Lasisi T.) the following obstacles have been identified for visually impaired people when traveling:

- **Navigation:** Navigating unfamiliar environments, including streets, public transportation systems, and airports, can be challenging without proper guidance. Visually impaired travelers may struggle to find their way, locate landmarks, and identify signage.
- **Information Access:** Accessing information, such as maps, schedules and written directions can be difficult without accessible formats like braille, audio descriptions or digital resources compatible with screen readers.
- **Obstacle Avoidance:** Identifying and avoiding physical obstacles like curbs, stairs, low-hanging branches and other hazards can be a daily challenge. Guide dogs or white canes help, but not all environments are designed with accessibility in mind.
- **Transportation:** Boarding buses, trains, subways and airplanes can be daunting, especially when platforms or boarding areas lack tactile or audible cues to assist visually impaired travelers.
- **Communication Barriers:** Communication can be hindered when interacting with people who do not understand the specific needs of visually impaired individuals. This can include ticketing personnel, airport security and fellow travelers.
- **Information Gaps:** Lack of information or announcements about delays, gate changes or other critical updates can leave visually impaired travelers feeling uncertain and isolated.



- **Accommodation Accessibility:** Accessible accommodations are not always readily available and there may be issues related to room layouts, bathroom facilities or the absence of tactile signage.
- **Restaurants and Dining:** Identifying and selecting food options in restaurants can be challenging without accessible menus and dining independently can be a concern for some travelers.
- **Safety Concerns:** Safety issues, such as uneven sidewalks, busy streets and crowded public spaces, can be significant concerns for visually impaired individuals while navigating urban environments.



## 4. TEN COMMON THEMES FOR CO-CREATING ITINERARIES AND PACKAGES

This research delves into ten significant themes that stand out as defining pillars within the regions of Italy and Croatia, but that can also be adapted to the targets of the OMNIS project, e.g., travellers with animals and visually impaired people travelling with dogs. From the art of wine making to the allure of traditional music and local festivals, from the exploration of natural and geological wonders to the immersive experiences of crafting artisanal products, these themes encapsulate the rich offer of these regions.

Here below the ten themes are briefly listed together with the reason why they suit OMNIS targets. Then the offer of the Eligible area for each theme is further explored.

### 1. Wine Tourism

Wine tourism relies heavily on sensory experiences, especially taste and smell. Visually impaired and blind travelers often have heightened senses in these areas, which can enhance their enjoyment of wine tasting. They can concentrate on the aroma, texture, and flavor of the wine in a more focused way. Moreover, wine regions often have rich histories and stories to tell about their wines, vineyards and winemakers. These narratives can be shared through engaging storytelling that doesn't rely solely on visual elements, making them accessible to everyone. Relevant examples can be found in many wineries in these two regions, which in most cases are also suitable for pets due to their open-air structure.

### 2. Oil, cheese, and other food specialties

As it was mentioned before, visually impaired individuals often have heightened senses of taste and smell due to their reliance on these senses in their daily lives. It helps them appreciate the taste of food more. While sighted individuals often rely heavily on visual cues when tasting and selecting products, visually impaired travelers can focus on their enhanced sense of taste, allowing them to



participate equally in the experience. This type of tourism also often provides opportunities for culinary education, where visually impaired travelers can learn about the techniques, ingredients and regional variations that make each specialty product unique. Guides and experts can describe the history, traditions, and craftsmanship behind these products in vivid detail, allowing visually impaired travelers to connect with the cultural and historical significance of what they are tasting. Sometimes the making of products is also allowed to create an immersive and equal experience. Even if this type of experience doesn't suit the presence of animals, local farmers usually welcome pets or have free spaces available.

### 3. Tradition-heritage (focus on local culture)

Traditional and cultural heritage tourism indeed involves immersive experiences that engage multiple senses of touch, taste and smell to fully appreciate cultural elements such as traditional textiles, crafts and cuisine. Many aspects of local culture and heritage are passed down through oral tradition, including stories, legends and folklore. Visually impaired travelers can benefit from guided tours or local storytellers who can vividly describe these narratives, making them accessible and enjoyable. Many heritage tourism experiences include hands-on activities, such as pottery-making, weaving or traditional workshops that rely on tactile exploration. As it is stated in the text, a lot of places in the eligible area offer pet accessibility to cultural sites.

### 4. Active

As written in the text (Chapter 3.1) the preferences of visually impaired travelers, gleaned from over 200 responses across Quora and Reddit forums, reveal a clear inclination towards engaging in activities that align with their abilities. A predominant segment with more than 100 responders expressing a preference for immersive natural and outdoor experiences. Notably, they enjoy engaging in things they can do, particularly adrenaline-inducing ones. Active tourism promotes inclusivity and accessibility, offering enriching sensor experiences in nature and fostering physical activity and well-being. They can immerse



themselves in the sounds, textures and scents of nature. Moreover, activities in this type of tourism like hiking, running, or cycling are beneficial also for pets because they encourage fitness and boost self-confidence. For some, pets provide an added sense of security during outdoor activities, especially in remote or wilderness settings.

### **5. Relax, detox and wellness**

Relaxation and wellness activities are ideal for everyone since they emphasize sensory experiences such as spa treatments, meditations, and stress relief therapies as they rely on touch, smell, and sound. Most of the facilities mentioned in the text are designed taking accessibility into account, making them suitable for individuals with disabilities and accompanied with trained staff that can provide assistance and guidance. Wellness tourism indeed has significant therapeutic benefits such as reducing muscle tension, improving sleep quality and overall well-being. These benefits can be experienced by all individuals, regardless of their visual impairment. Pets are usually not included in such experiences.

### **6. Natural and geological tourism**

Natural environments, such as forests, beaches or mountains, offer a wealth of sensory experiences beyond sight. Visually impaired travelers can appreciate the sound of nature, the feel of different textures and the scents of various plants and landscapes. Moreover, geological sites such as caves and canyons often have unique acoustic properties such as echoes and sound of dripping water that visually impaired travelers can enjoy. Croatia and Italy both have many natural and geological attractions that are accompanied by audio descriptions or guided tours specifically designed for visually impaired visitors: Croatia has been featured in the UNWTO compendium of best practices for accessible and inclusive tourism in natural areas. The inclusion highlights the Medvednica Nature Park's "Bliznec Forest Trail", an innovative project fully tailored to individuals with special needs". By the same token, all natural settings are



welcoming animals since they are outdoors, so travelers with pets can enjoy their trip even more.

### **7. Archeological**

Many archeological sites and artifacts offer tactile elements that allow visitors to touch and feel the historical remains, providing a 'sensory connection' to the past. A number of archeological museums have tactile maps and audio guides which provide detailed explanations of the historical context, significance and stories behind the artifacts and structures. Knowledgeable guides can offer descriptive tours, conveying historical information through storytelling and vivid verbal educational descriptions. Pets are allowed in some sites in Italy and Croatia.

### **8. Religious**

As religious tourism often centers around places of worship and spiritual significance, visually impaired travelers can experience a deep and profound spiritual connection, which goes beyond the possibility to see. Pets are usually not allowed in holy places.

### **9. Shopping and artisanal products**

Shopping involves the idea of buying products and getting to know the way they are made. In both states there are tours specifically realized for blind people, which are normally realized outdoor in the cities and towns streets, therefore pets will be more than welcome.

### **10. Traditional music and local festivals**

Music and festivals are completely related to hearing and enjoying new sounds. Some limits can be considered for pets, because of loud music. Therefore, the right options suitable for them must be chosen, while these events are usually realized outdoor.



### 1.3.1 Wine tourism offer in the eligible area

Wine tourism, also known as enotourism, is a specialized form of tourism that revolves around the experience of visiting vineyards, wineries and wine-producing regions. It allows tourists to immerse themselves in the world of wine, learn about the winemaking process and taste various wines. Wine tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years, attracting both wine enthusiasts and casual travelers who seek unique experiences. According to Future Market Insights, it is estimated that by the end of 2023, the expected revenue of this form of tourism will be 77.22 million euros (85,145 US dollars) globally, with expected growth rate after pandemic of 13.1% CAGR (Future Market Insights, 2023). Good news for the European Union, which encompasses 45% of the world wine production with Italy, Spain and France holding three-quarters (2020 Eurostat).

Many elements in this tourism sector have been developed in the last decade, often including in its offer food pairings, culinary experiences, and cultural and historical explorations. Popular trends in wine tourism usually encompass sustainable practices including organic and biodynamic approaches, experiential tourism, and high level of digitalization utilizing virtual tours and social media engagement for potential visitors (15.2%, after website 16% for attracting total audience). There is a growing trend toward customizing experiences based on the target audience. For example, approximately 85.5% of wine companies in Italy confirm that they tailor their wine tourism portfolios accordingly; 73.3 % are recommended for wine lovers and sommeliers, while offer for couples and high-spending customers have increased to 48.1% and 47.3%, respectively. Additionally, experiences designed for relaxation, well-being and newcomers are gaining popularity (WineNews, 2023)

Italy leads the European wine sector, producing 50.3M hectoliters (Statista, 2023) and with more than 383,000 wine estates in its territory (WineNews, 2022) with their vineyards typically spanning an average of 1.64 hectares. Interestingly, despite their abundance, small estates contribute only to 20% of the Italian wine





sold internationally. On the other hand, a substantial 80% of the wine comes from the 500 major cooperative or industrial firms (WineNews, 2022).

It has been estimated that nearly 16 million tourists each year come to Italy to discover the beauty of this industry, making it one of the prominent tourist sectors in the country (WineNews, 2022).

Most prominent tour types and age groups engaging in this form of tourism include group travelers between the ages of 25-34. In Italy, 86% of visitors are group visitors traveling within the radius of 200 km with only 14 % spending the night in the wine area (First Report on Roots Tourism in Italy, 2021). The offer is rather wide, with 31,8% of the estates welcoming tourists also on Sunday and 95,1% offering visits in English (Report Enoturismo e Vendite direct-to-consumer 2023, Divinea). The average receipt of wine tourists was 82,7€ in 2022 with 31,8% of customers buying at least one bottle at the end of the visit.

The Italian Eligible Area includes some interesting provinces for this sector. Veneto Region produced 11,747 thousand hectoliters of wine in 2021, with nearly 36% of it exported nationally.

Wine-related activities in Veneto, such as vineyard tours, wine tasting, and cellar visits, account for approximately 25% of all tourism activities in the region. Some of the most prominent wines of the Veneto Region include: Amarone, Prosecco, Soave and Valpolicella.

The Marche region is an emerging wine tourism destination with a rich viticultural heritage. This wonderful region offers a combination of stunning landscapes, historic towns and excellent wine-producing areas. It is renowned for its diverse wine varieties where each of them represents certain traditions. The hills of the Marche region are ideal for viticulture and the production of sweet and aromatic grapes from which top-quality wines are made (Italian Wine Region, 2023)

Two worth-visiting wine areas in the Marche region are The Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi, located in the province of Ancona, and Offida, in the province of



Ascoli Piceno. Furthermore, wine tourism in Marche offers a range of experiences ranging from vineyard tours and learning about winemaking process, local gastronomy that allows tourists to savor traditional dishes paired with local wines, to exploration of historic towns, castles, and art museums.

Moreover, the Abruzzo region is equally famous for its Montepulciano d'Abruzzo red wine, as well as the Trebbiano d'Abruzzo white wine. In one of Italy's major wine-producing regions, Puglia, we can find its Primitivo and Negroamaro robust red wines.

According to National Geographic Travelers and Condé Nast Traveler, a remarkable destination that has become popular in the wine tourism industry is Croatia, particularly its coastal region. Croatia holds the third place in South Europe for wine tourism and 12th in the world according to Croatian Wineries portal (Croatian Winemakers, 2023). The four main areas for wine production encompasses Dalmatia, Istra, Slavonia and Croatian Danube Region (Croatian Winemakers, 2023). Croatia has become home to many ecological wineries that prioritize sustainable and eco-friendly practices in their winemaking processes. These wineries focus on organic or biodynamic farming methods, minimizing their environmental impact while producing high-quality wines. One of these examples can be found in Nadin, situated in Ravni Kotari. In this area, 14 small-scale producers have embraced organic practices and cultivate grapes on a total of 50 hectares of land. Branko Cegac from Sveti Ivan Zelina stands out, having produced the first Croatian organic wine back in 2002. Wine exports in the period from January to October 2022 amounted to EUR 15.9 million, which represents an increase of 14.2% compared to the same period in 2021 (Ministry of Agriculture Croatia, 2023).

The coastal region of Dalmatia, in Croatia, is a promising wine tourism destination that offers a blend of breathtaking views of the Adriatic Sea and ancient winemaking traditions. The combination of Mediterranean macro-climate and diverse local micro-climates creates the ideal conditions for vine cultivation. Therefore, Dalmatia is home to numerous indigenous grape



varieties, which turn into many delicious wines, of which some of the most prominent are: Plavac Mali, Pošip, Babić, Plavina, Postup and Dingac. Another notable region, Istria, boasts several grape varieties like Malvasia Istriana, Teran and Refosco. Istria has also established several wine routes, known as ‘wine roads’, that guide visitors through the region’s wine-producing areas. One of the most famous white grape varieties in Istria, and that accounts for 75% of the region’s total wine production is Malvasia Istriana.

## Croatian Wine Regions and Varieties



Source: [visitcroatia.com](http://visitcroatia.com)

### 1.3.2 Oil, cheese and other specialties and tourism offer in the eligible area

The European Union holds the position of being both the primary producer and consumer of olive oil. Data from the European Commission reveal that Spain was the top producer in 2021, accounting for 64% of the total production, followed by Italy at 16%, Greece at 11%, and Portugal at 9%. These four countries, as mentioned, collectively contribute to approximately 99% of olive oil production within the EU (Cimerfraj.hr, 2022).



Food tourism has become a popular and enriching way for travellers to explore the world and one of the most delightful and immersive forms of culinary travel is oil, cheese and other specialties tourism. This form of food tourism industry focuses on the exploration and appreciation of unique and iconic food products and delicacies that define specific regions. Among the diverse forms of gastronomic travel, these particular forms have emerged as captivating avenues for discovering unique flavours and cultural heritage of specific regions. Exceptional destinations that have embraced this delectable niche are located in the Adriatic coast of Italy (Puglia, Abruzzo, Marche) and Croatia (Istria, Dalmatia).

Olive oil, often referred to as “liquid gold”, is an integral part of Mediterranean cuisine and it is celebrated for its health benefits. Oil tourism allows travellers to venture into beautiful olive groves, learn about the specific methods used to extract the oil from the olives and witness the age-old olive harvesting process.

In the world of olive-related tourism, 59% of tourists are attracted to the opportunity of meeting and conversing with olive oil producers, eager to gain insights into the olive oil production process. Garibaldi's research findings indicate that approximately 72% of individuals planning to visit an olive mill have the intention to purchase a high-quality product. This aligns with the larger trend of food-related spending, which is projected to reach 15 billion euros, with a significant portion earmarked for activities related to olive tourism and olive-based experiences. These findings highlight the appeal of groves and mills as summer destinations for tourists of all ages (DeAndreis, 2023).

In the project area, the Marche region covers an area of 7,200 hectares, and the oil produced here has excellent organoleptic properties. The quality of the oil is inextricably linked to the quality of the fruits themselves: the tender olives from Ascoli are highly valued, and are considered the best olives for serving; they are also available in brine, stuffed or fried "all'ascolana". The Italian Adriatic shore hosts a flourishing oil production industry and a rich assortment of cheese delights, making it the perfect place for food tourism. From the rolling hills of Emilia-Romagna to the stunning landscapes of Marche and Abruzzo, this coastal



region offers an enchanting journey of flavours, cultural heritage and authentic culinary experiences. Travelers can partake in olive oil tastings and tours of family-owned olive mills in places like Fermo and Ascoli Piceno.

Another prominent form of tourism, cheese tourism, attracts tourists into a world of dairy to explore farms and meet skilled cheesemakers, they try different cheeses and participate in workshops to learn techniques for making a wide range of cheese varieties. For cheese enthusiasts, Abruzzo boasts a variety of artisanal cheeses and on the hills around Chieti, there is inspiring olive oil mill visit and degustation of traditional food from that region such as arrosticini, ceci di navelli, fegatazzo di Ortona, genziana. In towns like Scanno and Sulmona, visitors can delve into the cheese-making process and visit local cheese producers. The Abruzzo region in Italy has rich culinary heritage and produces several delicious cheeses that include: Pecorino Abruzzese, a traditional sheep milk cheese, and Scamorza, similar to mozzarella but with a slightly firmer texture.

Neighboring region of Molise offers authentic experience for those seeking to discover traditional Italian cheese varieties and visit the local shops. One example includes the traditional shop of Giovanni Nomaro, where he produces high quality cheeses of this region, including Caciocavallo with characteristic teardrop shape (Abruzzolife, 2015).

Another prominent region in Italy that has been attracting a high number of visitors included in the Eligible area is Puglia, which attracts 6 million foreign tourists each year, and has a wide variety of offers for cheese lovers. One of the most famous cheeses in Italy, Burrata, originated in Puglia, making it a specialty of the region.



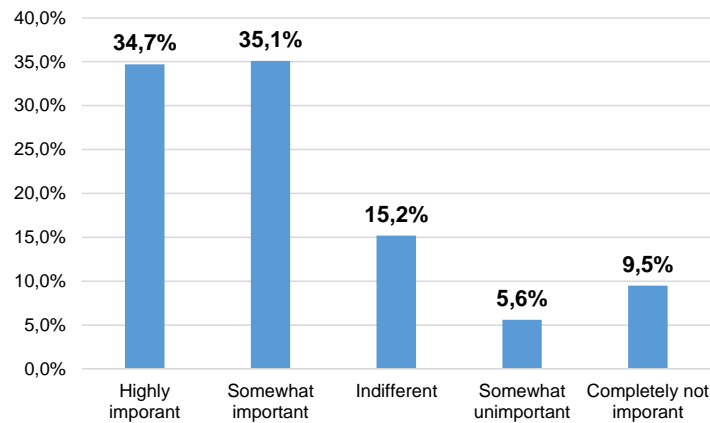


Source: giallo zafferano.com

Beyond oil and cheese, various other culinary specialties hold cultural and historical significance for food tourism that can be incorporated, such as traditional sweets and desserts, spices, craft beers, and more. Popular Italian coffee liqueur, Borghetti, originated in Ancona, is made from the perfect combination of espresso coffee, alcohol and sugar. Puglia is renowned for its distinct pasta shapes, including orecchiette, which perfectly complements its olive tourism experiences.

Within the EU, Croatia boasts five olive oils with protected geographical indications - Cres, Korčula, Šolta, Krka, and Istrian extra virgin olive oil. In 2021, Croatian olive growers achieved remarkable recognition at the prestigious New York International Olive Oil Competition, securing an impressive 67 gold and 20 silver medals. Only Italy, Spain, and Greece received more accolades. This outstanding achievement is particularly significant for a small country like Croatia. However, despite this success, there is currently a lack of systematic promotion for olive tourism. It is essential for olive oil tourism to become a strategic driver of tourism development in Croatia.

*How much local traditional cuisine is important when choosing tourist destination in Croatia?*



Source: Samardzic, V. (U OSIJEKU, siječanj 2021.) marketinški aspekti gastronomskog turizma

According to this data, trying traditional food is more important to more educated responders (76,2 with university degree vs 65,6 % with high school diploma), to employed more than to unemployed (73,4% vs 65,1%) and to people with higher income (75,6% vs 66,1%).

Food tourism in Croatia has been steadily growing, welcoming around 20 million international tourists, making it one of the top destinations in Europe. According to historical research data, there has been a noticeable upward trend in gastronomy becoming a prominent motivator for tourists visiting Croatia. In 2012, 22% of tourists cited gastronomy as their primary reason for visiting, which increased to 26% in 2014, and further rose to 29% in 2017 (Skryl, Gregoric, Dugi, 2018). The European Research Studies Journal shows that Croatia has over 2300 restaurants, 716 pizzerias, 763 taverns, 301 inns and 1227 other facilities (Culinary trends in the Republic of Croatia as part of gastro tourism, 2018). There are numerous food tours organized in Dubrovnik, Zadar, Split as well as in Central Croatia such as Zagreb Food & Wine Journey: Farmer's market – Brunch – Boutique winery, The Dionysus Tour Lunch or dinner and Wine Tasting at Plesivica Zadar – Private Market Tour & Cooking Class, Dalmatian Delights: Food & Wine Tour from Split or Trogir (Istra Gourmet). Moreover, Istra is a paradise for



olive oil production with its high-quality extra virgin olive oils with unique fruity and peppery notes. In places like Pula and Rovinj, visitors can take guided tours of olive groves and learn about its production. Talking about cheese tourism in Croatia, cheese is an essential part of the culinary heritage and attracts a number of visitors each year to delicious tastes of varieties of its production. Dalmatia's cheese-making tradition is famous for its renowned Pag cheese that takes centre stage. Pag cheese was declared the best sheep's cheese in the world at the Global Cheese Awards in Somerset in England on September 12, 2017 (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022). Other popular types include: Krcki, Bracki, Istarski and Dubrovacki, as the treasures of coastal area's cuisine. The area also features fresh seafood delicacies like grilled fish and octopus dishes.

### 1.3.3 Tradition-heritage (focus on local culture) and tourism offer in eligible area

Tradition-heritage tourism (cultural tourism) emphasizes experiencing and preserving the authentic traditions, customs and heritage of a certain destination. It gives travellers the opportunity to delve into the unique cultural fabric of the place and gain insights into the historical and artistic aspects that define its identity. In a world increasingly shaped by globalization and modernization, tradition-heritage tourism serves as a getaway to the past, connecting travellers with the essence of a community's roots and cultural legacy. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, cultural tourism accounts for a significant percentage of international tourism representing around 40% of all international arrivals (UNWTO, 2018).

When travellers engage with local communities and experience their traditions firsthand, it creates a perfect platform for cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

Tradition-heritage tourism often revolves around historic sites, monuments and heritage buildings that stand as a living testament to a region's past. It also encourages travellers to witness traditional dances, music, theatre, and other forms that celebrate the values and beliefs of the destination's culture.





Europe is home to the highest number of cultural and natural properties that have been granted UNESCO's World Heritage status in the world. As of 2023, there is a total of 1,199 properties on UNESCO's world heritage list across 168 countries, of which 53 are located in Italy alone, including the historical centre of Rome and Venice with its lagoon.

The Adriatic coast of Italy and Croatia is famous for its cultural heritage from the ancient towns of Italy's coastline to the historic sites of Croatia's shores. Italian tradition-heritage tourism along the Adriatic coast offers a wonderful mix of artistic treasures and culinary delights that pay homage to the country's past. As of 2021, the number of museums in Italy totalled over four thousand. Most institutions were classified as museums, galleries, or archives, whereas the country had nearly 300 archaeological parks or sites (Statista, 2021, Museums with the highest income in Italy and **Made in Land** European Project documents).

In the eligible area, towns like Venice, Ravenna and Bari represent well-preserved monuments sites and their historical significance. From the stunning Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna to breathtaking St. Mark's square in Venice, visitors can explore the beauty of Italians architectural marvels. Redentore is a popular religious and cultural celebration in Venice that includes religious ceremonies, a regatta and a spectacular fireworks display. Handmade lace in Burano and ceramic pottery in Grottaglie showcase Italy's artistic traditions. In Lace Museum of Burano, there are more than 200 laces of various types displayed, and visitors can explore the origins of lace-making schools (Coopculture, 2023).





Source: the geographical cure.com and vivovenetia.com (Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna and Redentore)

In Puglia, there are several specifically designed cultural places where you can stay and completely immerse yourself in the culture of this Italian region. A truly captivating choice for lodging is a 'masseria'. A masseria is an expansive fortified estate exclusive to Puglia, with origins tracing back to the 16th century. Beyond simply providing a place to stay, a masseria promises an unparalleled cultural journey where guests have the opportunity to relish the most authentic local cuisine.

Urbino, situated within the Marche region, stands as a pivotal cultural hub. Recognized by its profound significance, the historic center of Urbino has earned the prestigious title of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The remarkable Ducal Palace, known as Palazzo Ducale, graces Urbino with its grandeur, distinguishing itself as not only one of Italy's largest but also the inaugural palace of its kind. Enriching this cultural treasure trove is the National Art Gallery of the Marche, boasting an unparalleled assortment of Renaissance artworks that rank among the globe's foremost collections (Vellaneta, 2020).

At the medieval town of Acquaviva Picena, there is the opportunity to witness the live creation of "pajarole", which are baskets made by local women using agricultural processing waste such as wheat straw and wicket. Moreover, Fabriano is renowned as the city of paper, boasting both industrial production and artisanal processing. It is the birthplace of the watermark techniques, commonly used for money and houses a dedicated museum that demonstrates paper and watermark history. Visitors can explore various workshops where they can purchase exquisite handmade papers (Enjoy Marche, 2023).





Source: Italia.it and finestre sull'arte.com (Palazzo Ducale Urbino and the National Art Gallery of the Marche)

By the same token, Croatia's Adriatic coast boasts a rich cultural heritage with historical landmarks and local customs. It has 10 official UNESCO Heritage Sites. According to Statista, 24% of people answered that the main reason why they go on vacation to Croatia is because of its cultural heritage and beautiful traditional sites, and 32% of tourists extended their stay up to three days to include cultural and artistic programs in their trip (Statista, 2015, Holiday Travel in Croatia in 2015).

The walled city of Dubrovnik, the Diocletian's Palace in Split and the ancient town of Trogir are just a few examples of Croatia's historical treasures. Numerous festivals located on the coast celebrate the country's diverse folk traditions. Cultural festivals in Zagreb, The Dubrovnik Summer Festival and Rijeka Carnival demonstrate Croatia's vibrant cultural scene. Performances of theater plays, orchestras and ensembles alone were seen by more than 2.5 million visitors, of which more than half were held in Zagreb.

Additionally, visitors can engage with local artisans in Korcula and learn about traditional pottery techniques and acquire authentic souvenirs. The island of Pag is famous for its intricate lace-making traditions, Dubrovnik for handmade jewelry crafted by local artisans and traditional embroidery techniques practiced in Dalmatia region.



Source: CroatiaLace.com (Island of Pag)

The results of research on a sample of cultural institutions in the Republic of Croatia show that the majority of cultural heritage buildings with existing capacities can accommodate twice as many visitors. At the same time, the results show that schoolchildren are the biggest users of cultural heritage objects within the framework of organized school excursions. Visitors who could be characterized as domestic and foreign tourists make 37% of visits to cultural heritage sites. Next, 20% of the realized income of cultural heritage buildings is achieved through the sale of tickets. It should be emphasized that in the area of Dalmatia, this share is 40% (Gredičak, 2009).

#### 1.3.4 Active Tourism and offer in the eligible area

Active tourism involves engaging in physically challenging and adventurous activities in natural and often remote environments. It is designed for individuals who seek excitement, adrenaline and a deeper connection with nature. It goes beyond traditional sightseeing and offers travelers the opportunity to participate in thrilling experiences in a dynamic way. It includes a wide range of activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, kayaking, zip-lining, skydiving and so on. These activities often involve an element of risk and challenge and often take place in natural settings far away from urban life. It is usually led by experienced guides who ensure safety and provide instructions. As of May 2021, the keyword “Adventure Tourism” has approximately 18,100 monthly searches on Google, as estimated by Gitnux Market Data.



Europe dominates the adventure tourism market, with CXOs predicting steady growth due to economic expansion and an increasing trend of this type of traveling, especially among the age group of 30-41 and couples as the most popular type of travelers (Allied Market Research, 2023).

According to Statista, in a global survey held between July and December 2022, 93% of respondents answered that hiking and walking were the predominant mountain-related tourism activities in their countries. In contrast, 16% of survey participants said that other activities, which included birdwatching, adventure, climbing, and mountaineering were the predominant mountain tourism activities in their countries (Statista, 2023, Leading Mountain Tourism Activities globally).

Moreover, this type of tourism promotes physical fitness and well-being, with activities that improve cardiovascular health, strength, endurance, and stress relief. It challenges participants to overcome fears and limitations and accomplish personal growth and increased self-confidence. In a survey from 2017, 57% of travelers agreed that adventure travel activities improved their mental and emotional wellbeing (Gitnux, 2023).

Active tourism along the Adriatic coast of Croatia and Italy offers travelers a thrilling and dynamic way to experience magnificent landscapes and diverse natural beauty. There is an array of both on land and sea activities for adrenaline seekers. Italy holds the second position in terms of preference for active travel.

Data from Statista demonstrated that, according to a 2020 survey focusing on Italian and international hikers, exploring new places was one of the main reasons for hiking in Italy. Spending time in nature was the second most popular reason that year, chosen by nearly half of the respondents. On the contrary, just around 20% of the survey sample hiked to meet new people. Hiking is considered a form of ecotourism, a type of tourism focusing on aspects such as environmental sustainability and respect for local cultures and traditions.



Cycling holidays have also boomed, with weekend/leisure bikers increasing between 30% and 60% across the UK and Europe between 2019 and 2022, according to European Parliament estimates (Barrell, 2023).

Italy's Adriatic coast has a popular route for cyclists through picturesque coastal towns from Trieste to Leuca. There is also an excellent condition for kitesurfing and windsurfing in the Emilia-Romagna coast. The Marche region is quite popular for active tourism and has a dedicated organization for creating ideal trips according to the preferences of travelers.

Most popular activities include hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and so on in beautiful locations like Monte Conero, San Bartolo or Parco Nazionale Dei Monti Sibillini, famous for hang-gliding and parascending. Well-known Fiastra Adventure Park in this region features zip lines and thrilling bridges between trees that make this park adventurous (Rafting in Umbria, 2023). For climbing enthusiasts, there are numerous destinations that include Ancona and Pesaro and the cliffs of Conero Regional Park. There are also breathtaking views from above for paragliders across all coastal areas.



Source: Asgaia.com (Fiastra Adventure Park)

In Puglia, Gargano National Park offers numerous hiking trails through its diverse landscapes. Horse riding classes are a popular activity in this national park that offers unique experiences. The Sentiero del Pizzomunno is a popular

hiking route that leads to the iconic Pizzomunno rock formation. Another unique experience in Puglia is snorkeling in various locations like Punta Prosciutto, Lecce, Polignano, Bari Porto Selvaggio and so on.



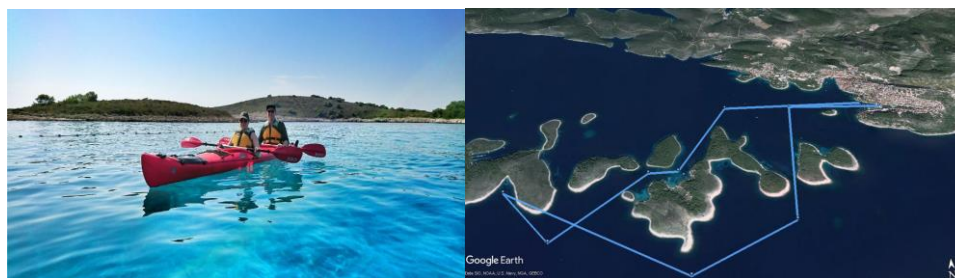
Source: Italia.it (Gargano National Park Puglia)

In the Veneto region, we can encounter the biggest free flight center in Europe, Borso del Grappa, which attracts 40.000 tourists yearly (Italiaslowtour.com, 2023).

You can also book your rowing lesson in Venetian lagoon and learn the traditional Venetian style of rowing, the 'voga alla veneta'.

The Croatian coast is also a heaven for adventure seekers. At the beginning of the 21st century, the first adventure races were held in Croatia under the names "Cro-Challenge", "Terra Incognita" and "KI.Challenge" and thus, Croatia was marketed and promoted as an fascinating adventure destination.

Nowadays, Croatia is among the top five destinations for kayaking (Category: Travel. Ruralica. 2021). The Pakleni Islands, just off the coast of Hvar Island, provide a unique kayaking experience. Kup, Cetina and Krka River are most popular destinations where you can enjoy outstanding views of Croatian natural landscapes.



Source: RedAdventuresCroatia.com and HvarLife.com (The Pakleni Islands kayaking)

For hike lovers, Paklenica National Park and Krka National Park have stunning view points and picturesque trails. Vidova Gora, 778 meters above the sea level located in the island of Brac, represents the highest peak on all Adriatic islands.

Biking is another popular trend in Croatia, with one of the most beautiful cycling trails through the Plitvice Lakes National Park. The coastal towns and islands are perfect settings for exploring hidden coves, sea caves and beautiful beaches.

The Adriatic coast in Croatia is also a treasure for scuba divers and snorkelers. Popular diving spots include the Kornati Islands, Vis Island and the Blue Cave on Bisevo Island. With its countless islands and charming harbors, there is also sailing and yachting experience. Visitors can rent a boat or luxury yachts to navigate the Adriatic Sea and discover idyllic island villages along the way. Additionally, Croatia is a place for numerous adrenaline parks such as Ogi, Kupjak and Medulin.



Source: YachtCharterFleet



### 1.3.5 Relax, detox and wellness tourism offer in the eligible area

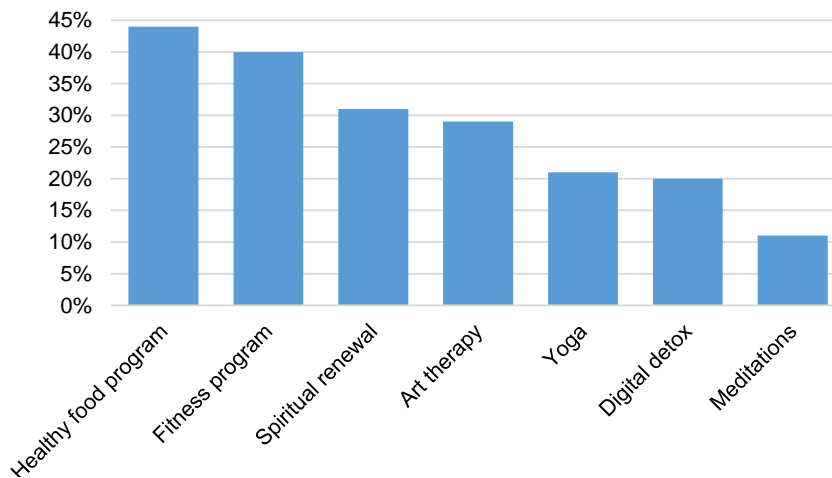
Wellness tourism is a form of travel that focuses on rejuvenating the mind, body and soul through various relaxation techniques and wellness activities. It attracts individuals who seek to escape the stresses of everyday life, improve their overall well-being and engage in practices that promote health and balance. According to National Geographic portal, over a fifth (21%) of global travelers are currently traveling for health- and wellness-driven reasons according to the 2022 Travel Trends research by luxury travel network Virtuoso, conducted jointly with YouGov. Its findings suggest this is likely to grow in 2023, with 29% of global travelers stating interest in traveling for wellness reasons in the future. Trends include travel to reconnect — with friends, family, partners or children — and a growing focus on sleep wellness (Barrell, 2023).

The European wellness tourism market is very diverse and offers many opportunities. Trends that are creating promising opportunities include the holistic understanding of wellness, an increased focus on fitness and nutrition, and the influence of social media on booking wellness holidays. (CBI, 2022)

GWI predicts that the wellness economy will return to its robust growth and will continue to expand its share in consumer spending and the global economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new shifts that accelerate many wellness drivers, including a growing awareness of the role of the built environment in health, a growing focus on mental health and well-being, a rethinking of the balance of work and life, an expanding focus on social justice and environmental sustainability, and much more. According to GWI projection, during the 2020-2025 time period the global wellness economy will grow at a robust rate of 9.9% annually, a growth rate significantly higher than projected global economic growth (7.3% according to current IMF forecasts); and is expected to grow to nearly \$7.0 trillion in 2025. (Global Wellness Institute, 2021)



*Reasons why people engage in this type of tourism, according to Skift (globally)*



Source: <https://www.cimerfraj.hr/ideje/wellness-turizam>

According to the information from the graphic above, we can conclude that a healthy food program is the most preferred reason accounting for more than 40% responders, followed by fitness program (40%) and spiritual renewal (31%).

Interface Tourism blog reveals that 62.7% of travellers who choose to take care of their wellbeing while traveling are women. The travellers who most demand this style of holiday (19.5%) are between the ages of 35 and 44, followed closely by the 25-34 age group (17.4%) along with those aged between 55-64 (18.7%). Most respondents who choose this type of holiday are married or living with a partner (44.1%) while 36.7% are single. The vast majority do not have children, or their children have already become independent. The most common budget dedicated to this kind of travel is between 1,000 and 3,000 euros, and travellers tend to have incomes between 18,000- 36,000 euros (28.2%) or 36,000- 60,000 euros (21.7%) (Interface Tourism, 2023).

Wellness tourism destinations often offer a variety of relaxation therapies, such as spa treatments, massages, mediation sessions and yoga classes. These activities aim to reduce stress and foster a sense of tranquillity. This type of tourism also involves healthy diets planned for tourists, herbal treatments or fasting programs. It may include organic meals to remove toxins and promote a

better lifestyle. A McKinsey report in 2021 noted that 79% of respondents believed wellness was important and 42% considered it a top priority, but in the preceding two to three years consumers in every market it researched reported a substantial increase (from 27% to 65%) in the prioritization of wellness. Within the last decade, yoga mats have become the norm in hip hotels and gym access a hospitality standard, while spa-focused accommodation is ever-expanding (Barrell, 2023).

Globally, domestic travel accounts for 82% of total wellness tourism trips and 65% of expenditures. International wellness trips represent a proportionally larger share of expenditures because the average level of spending for an international trip is much higher. International wellness tourism trips have also been growing at a faster pace (12% annually) than domestic wellness tourism trips (9% annually) from 2015-2017. (Global Wellness Institute; Global Wellness Tourism Economy: Europe.2018)

According to a 2018 GWI study, foreign wellness tourists spend 53% more than the average tourist, while domestic wellness tourists spend as much as 178% more (Cimerfraj.hr)

Harmonious blend of coastal landscapes and therapeutic spa facilities in Italian and Croatian shores are perfect destinations for relaxation and detox. Numerous coastal resorts along the Adriatic coast offer wellness and spa centres, thermal baths and hydrotherapy pools with the services of massages and facial and body scrubs.

Croatia has seen a significant increase throughout the years in the number of tourists wanting to have wellness experiences. However, despite having developed offers and programs for wellness tourism, the utilization is mainly limited to 50% during the summer months. This suggests that while the country has a decent wellness tourism infrastructure, it could use more of its resources. According to the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, there are 68 hotel wellness centres in Croatia, although according to brochures and catalogues, more than 80 wellness centres are listed today. The largest number of wellness service



providers is concentrated in the coastal and north-western part of the country, and when it comes to the wellness offer, we are talking about hotels and spas, namely: hotels with wellness facilities in the area of Istria, Kvarner, the counties of Northern Croatia and in the area of Zagreb, and; Spa with accommodation: Terme Tuhelj; Terme Jezerčica; Terme Sveti Martin; Lešće Spa. Interestingly, The Varaždin spa is one of the oldest and most famous spas in the Republic of Croatia, and among them are Krapinske toplice, Lipik, and the spas on Hvar, Opatija and Veli Lošinj. (Nikolic, K. 2021. wellness turizam u republici hrvatskoj)



Source:Varazdinski.hr (Hotel Tourist, spa Hedona)

Other prominent destinations comprise Dubrovnik Wellness Retreat (Sun Gardens Dubrovnik and Hotel Excelsior) that includes yoga sessions on the Adriatic coast, meditations and healthy local meals.

A further perfect spot for this form of tourism is in Vis Island, known for its tranquility and natural beauty. Moreover, therapeutic benefits of lavender-infused treatments can be found at the Hvar Lavender Spa. It offers various spa treatments, sauna sessions and access to indoor and outdoor pools with sea views. Trakoscan Castle, considered by many as the most beautiful castle in Croatia, is located 40 kilometers from Varaždin and 80 kilometers from Zagreb. Besides the impressive fortress itself, the destination is renowned for its stunning natural surroundings, offering leisurely walks in the forest and around the lake. Hotel Trakoscan is a charming establishment adjacent to the castle that

provides amenities like a hydromassage tub, spa, swimming pool, Finnish and Turkish saunas, diverse range of massage and beauty services, and more.



Source: Booking.com, Lavender Hill Hvar Villa)

According to Global Wellness Institute, Italy Ranks as the 10th largest national wellness tourism market in the world and 12th fastest-growing market for wellness trips. Moreover, the country ranks as the 5th-largest thermal/mineral springs market in the world, as with 768 facilities, Italy trails only China, Japan, Germany and Russia (ItaliaLiving.com).

Data provided by Competitive Data show that Terme e Grandi Alberghi Sirmione S.p.A. was the leading spa and wellness center in the county (Global Wellness Institute).

According to ENIT- Agenzia Nazionale del Turismo, 46% percent of travelers combine sport with other nature-based activities on holiday and 22% practice an activity related to wellness during their holiday, with spas in the lead (34%) followed by massages, thermal baths and beauty treatments,' says Roberta Garibaldi, managing director of ENIT.

Spa Retreat in Puglia such as Borgobianco Resort&Spa and Baiamalva Resort provides thalassotherapy which utilizes seawater and marine products for therapeutic purposes. Riccione in Emilia-Romagna has a wide range of luxurious spas with thermal baths and hydrotherapy. Additionally, a serene yoga retreat in Pesaro provides daily yoga classes and meditation sessions set amidst the tranquillity of nature and coastline. Oliveto Estate is a luxury villa located in the Italian Adriatic in the Marche region. It features a heated pool with sauna and

spa, sport activities as well as yoga, pilates and dance classes. In the Marche countryside, you can find several meditation retreats such as 8 Day Secluded Silent Meditation in Assisi, Yoga Beach Retreat in numerous coastal places, emotional and fitness retreats and many more. People reviewed 7 Day Healing Trauma Retreat at San Flaviano, Italy with highest recommendations according to TripAdvisor. The program includes gluten free or plant-based diet, different styles of yoga, luxury thermal spa and daily workshops on healing and release of stress.



Source: Oliveto Estate.com

It is also worth mentioning detoxifying Mediterranean cuisine, rich in fresh fruits, vegetables, olive oils and seafood. Detox retreats in these regions often provide organic and nutritious meals, complementing the detoxification process and promoting overall well-being. Whether visiting spa centres, savouring amazing Mediterranean cuisine or practicing mindful activities by the sea, the Adriatic coast of Italy and Croatia offers an unforgettable wellness experience that calms the mind and leaves the travellers with cherished memories.

### 1.3.6 Natural and geological tourism and tourism offer in the eligible area

Natural and geological tourism involves exploring and appreciating the natural landscapes, geological features and processes of a certain region. It focuses on the Earth's geological heritage, such as mountains, caves, rock formations, volcanoes, mineral deposits, and so on. The fastest growing element of tourism

is 'nature-based' tourism, involving excursions to national parks and wilderness area. Caves are among the most visited geological features in the world, attracting over 70 million people every year in more than 1,200 caves worldwide, and amounting up to 800 million (2022, A Global Perspective on Sustainable Show Cave Tourism, Chiarini V, Duckeck J. and Waele J.D.).

Geotourism allows travellers to discover the Earth's geological history and witness unique and spectacular natural formations. It also allows travellers to learn about the geological history of certain destinations and raise awareness about the importance of preserving geological heritage. There is a sense of deeper connection with nature and a sense of wonder about the Earth's geological diversity. Many regions are designated as geoparks or UNESCO Global Parks. Europe has a large target market for nature tourism. In a 2016 study by TNS Travel, respondents in the following countries listed 'nature' as the main reason for their holiday: Czech Republic (26%), Netherlands (25%), Bulgaria (23%), Romania (20%), Belgium (19%) and Poland (19%). (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The Adriatic coast of Italy and Croatia offers a number of natural and geological tourism opportunities with its diverse range of landscapes and geological features. Both countries have rich geological heritage, shaped by tectonic activity, volcanic eruptions and erosional processes over millions of years. In an exploratory study held in Italy, 56.69% (246 million) of the overnight stays were allocated to NBT. The analysis shows that 43% (more than 30 million) of the overnight stays in the Veneto Region were allocated to nature; 75% (more than 39 million) in Trentino Alto Adige and 61.6% (29 million) in Tuscany. (Zulian G., La Notte A, 2022)

Italy hosts 2637 nature sites considering: Special Protection Areas (SPAs); Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Community Importance (Zulian G., La Notte A, 2022)

Croatia has 1244 natural formations, which is impressive considering its size. When it comes to water treasures in Croatia, according to the UNESCO report on



water supply in 188 countries of the world, Croatia ranks third in Europe, behind Norway and Iceland. Croatia's protected areas cover 8.54% of its total area, that is 11.38% of the Croatian mainland. Of this, 4.76% are national parks and parks nature. Until now, in the Register of Protected Natural Values on the territory of Croatia, 461 protected areas are registered, and 9 of them are under preventive protection Croatia is one of the few countries with a rich and diverse forest fund covers 37% of its total territory (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, 2013).

Brijuni Islands, off the coast of Istria, should be highlighted by its blend of natural beauty and historical heritage. It has ancient dinosaur footprints, well-preserved Roman ruins and karst landscapes that feature unique geological destinations.



Source: expatincroatia.com

The Plitvice Lakes National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage site and showcases 16 small lakes interconnected by waterfalls created by sedimentation travertine. The interesting fact is that the lake and waterfalls are not formed by rivers, but by a unique natural process. By the same token, the Kornati National Park, situated off the coast of Zadar, comprises a stunning array of over 100 islands making it one of the densest island groups in the Mediterranean. Visitors can enjoy sailing or boat tours around the island while admiring fossil-rich cliffs and submerged caves. Also, the 500 feet deep Cetina River flows through the Dalmatia region and is one of the most important watercourses of the country. Interestingly, Vrama Lake, located on the island of Cres in Croatia, is a mesmerizing natural phenomenon that exudes an air of mystique. Its secrecy is





attributed to the intriguing and unexplained observation whose bottom lies below sea level, fresh and saltwater remain separate and do not mix. Another interesting natural beauty site of Croatia is the Blue Cave (Modra Spilja) popular for its unique cave entrance that is below sea level. When the sunlight reflects off the sandy bottom, it bathes the cave in a mesmerizing blue glow.



Source: Unesco.org and Visit kornati.com (Plitvice Lakes National Park and Kornati National Park)

The Italian Adriatic coast has an enchanting geological heritage. Recent statistical findings from ISTAT affirm the progressive upsurge of natural tourism in Italy. This shift has been particularly prominent among young individuals with approximately 40% being middle and high school students, participating in environmental education initiatives. Geotourism has been fostered through both national and international commendation platform including: Borghi più belli d'Italia, Bandiere Arancioni del Touring Club Italiano, Borghi Autentici d'Italia, Fondo Ambiente Italiano, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation sites. This trend has been further fueled by the establishment of numerous protected areas across Italy as well as regional and local authorities financial support (2022, Angelo Cusano)

One of the notable examples is The Gargano Peninsula, located in Puglia that has a diverse area of limestone cliffs, sea caves and wonderful beaches. Visitors have the opportunity to explore the Grotta di San Michele, a fascinating sea cave.



Source: EarchTrekkers.com (Gargano Peninsula)

The network of protected areas of the Marche region includes 2 national parks shared with Abruzzo, 4 regional parks, and 5 natural reserves (• Piacentini T., & Castaldini D., Coratza P., Farabollini P., Miccadei E. Geotourism: some examples in Northern-Central Italy. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*. Year IV no.2, 2011.). The Conero Regional Park in Marche is known for its rugged cliffs that plunge into the Adriatic Sea. From breathtaking viewpoints, visitors can witness unbelievable geological processes that shaped this coastal landscape. Furlo is a narrow gorge in the Marche region, protected as a natural reserve due to its unique geological features and historical importance of roman tunnels. Famous natural swimming pool surrounded by cliffs, Grotta della Poesia, is located on the eastern tip of the Salento Peninsula. Another remarkable natural reserve, Riserva Naturale Statale delle Grotte di Castellana, houses the impressive Castellana Caves, a series of underground caves and caverns with stalactite and stalagmite formations, offering an unforgettable geological exploration.



Source: viaggiesorrisi.com and parks.it (Furlo and Conero Regional Park)

These and many more natural and geological tourism destinations along the Adriatic coast of Italy and Croatia offer travelers a chance to connect with the Earth's geological history and experience the beauty of the coastline through educational and unique journeys.

### 1.3.7 Archeological Tourism and offers in the projects areas

Archeological tourism involves visiting archeological sites, ancient ruins and historical monuments to explore and learn about past civilizations and cultures. It allows travelers to immerse themselves in the rich history of a certain destination and witness ancient artifacts, customs and traditions. Since the 1970s, the demand for this type of tourism has been increasing, especially because many archaeological tourism sites have been included in the World Heritage List (2022, Irene Verde).

Archeological sites often encompass temples, pyramids, ancient cities, amphitheatres, archaeological excavations and so on. Moreover, it can include on-site museums and exhibitions displaying artifacts, art, historical relics found during excavations and many more. Knowledgeable guides and archeologists enhance the visitor's experience offering the stories behind the archeological sites. This form of tourism fosters a sense of connection to the past allowing travelers to step back in centuries or millennia ago. By facilitating cultural exchange, visitors come from different parts of the world to explore and learn about shared historical heritage. The number of visitors each year drastically increases, for example, according to Statista, the number of visitors to the archaeological site of Pompeii in Italy nearly doubled in 2021 over the previous year, and welcomed roughly one million visitors in 2021 (Statista). With its archaeological attractions and museums, Italy attracts 38 million visitors a year.

The Mastercard report says that high-value tourism often relies precisely on the rich archaeological and cultural heritage of cities. It is stated that carrying out archeology tourism arrangements with five groups is the most popular type of



tourism, from the German and British markets. These are guests 55+ who are interested either exclusively in archeology or sometimes in archeology in combination with other cultural-historical heritage and gastronomy. The average consumption of an individual per trip ranges from 1,200 to 3,000 euros. (Ministry of Tourism and Sport Croatia)

According to TripAdvisor, there is a great satisfaction with excellent collections of prehistoric, ancient or medieval monuments in museums, about excellently guided tours, temptingly low prices, but also about limited museum opening hours, especially in May, i.e. outside the summer season. Comments often express great surprise at the unexpectedly rich archaeological heritage - impressive, surprisingly unique, of extraordinary aesthetics. Archaeological heritage is also a motive for student trips, scientific tourism and field schools conducted by international educational institutions (TripAdvisor).

Both Italy and Croatia offer a beautiful mix of cultural exploration and historical discovery as well as an educational form of traveling. The Adriatic coast of Croatia and Italy is rich in archeological treasures, offering a wealth of archeological tourism opportunities.

In Croatia, according to reports of Ministry of Tourism and Sport, the archeological tourism is an important and growing form of tourism in Republic of Croatia, and statistically, 50% of visitors came organized in groups, and among them there were mostly school groups (around 50%), seniors (35%) and adults (15%). It is also known that a smaller number of group visitors inside the museum spend from HRK 20(2,65 euros) to HRK 200 (26,54 euros) on souvenirs and publications. A large number of group visitors, including the price of the entrance ticket and guide in the museum, roughly spends an average of HRK 50 (6.65 euros) (Ministry of Tourism and Sport Croatia). Croatian sites and museum institutions are visited annually by a total of 4.8 million visitors (for 2015, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Sport in Croatia).

Monuments dating back to the Roman period demonstrate the significant artistic and economic impact of the vast Roman Empire on the region. One of



the most important places to visit include Diocletian's Palace in Split, Pula Arena in the city of Pula, and the largest Roman forum in Croatia, in Zadar. Pula in particular boasts the most well-preserved monuments, with its amphitheater being the sixth largest in the world among surviving examples. The Pula Arena represents an exceptionally beautiful amphitheater dating back to the 1st century AD. It hosts various cultural events, including concerts and film festivals. Diocletian's Palace is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is one of the best-preserved Roman palaces in the world. It was built in the 4th century AD by the Roman Emperor Diocletian and it forms the heart of Split's Old Town.



Source: lonelyplanet.com and Wikipedia (Roman Forum in Zadar and Pula Arena)

Salona is an extensive archeological park near Split and demonstrates the remains of ancient Roman buildings such as temples, aqueducts and amphitheatres. Notable archeological sites include Scitarjevo near Zagreb, Varazdinske Toplice and Burnum. Trogic consists of various Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance buildings that make this wonderful town a perfect place for archeological enthusiasts. The episcopal complex in Pore houses the mosaics of the Euphrasian Basilica, from the 6th century (Ministry of Tourism and Sport Croatia).



Source: getbybus.com

Talking about Italy, it is without a doubt one of the most important archeological tourist destinations in the world with numerous fascinating places that offer insights into rich history and ancient civilizations. The two most popular cultural sites in Italy are both archaeological; 6,5 million people a year go to see the Colosseum and the Roman Forum, and almost 3 million go to Pompeii; while, with over 6 million, the most popular of the museums are those of the Vatican, which belong to the Vatican itself. (2017, Arbitrare, Fabio Isman).

Another archeological treasure in Italy is Sicily, estimating in 2018 the visitors were 928,952 and 354,941, with revenues of 6.6 and 2.6 million euros respectively in the “Valle dei Templi” archaeological park in Agrigento and in the “Villa romana del Casale” archaeological area in Piazza Armerina (Giuffrida, S.; Gagliano, F.; Giannitrapani, E.; Marisca, C.; Napoli, G.; Trovato, M.R. Promoting Research and Landscape Experience in the Management of the Archaeological Networks. A Project-Valuation Experiment in Italy. Sustainability 2020).



Source: wikipedia and ministero della cultura.it “Valle dei Templi” archaeological park in Agrigento and in the “Villa romana del Casale” archaeological area in Piazza Armerina)

Largest Roman settlement in Adriatic coast is Fano and represents several well-preserved Roman arches, gates, astonishing Roman walls, amphitheaters that once hosted gladiator games as well as popular Museum of Fano with remarkable collection of Roman artifacts. “Fano Underground” takes you beneath the streets to explore ancient cisterns, tunnels and other subterranean structures. (Wonderful Marche.com)

In Ancona, the well-preserved Roman theater is built into the hillside and offers impressive views of the Adriatic Sea. Magnificent coastal towns in the Marche region, Numana and Sirolo, have archeological sites that include Roman villas and remains of ancient settlements. In Osimo, we can find underground Roman caves, which served as cisterns during ancient times.



Source: TripAdvisor (Roman Amphitheatre in Ancona)

Moreover, Egnazia, located near Fasano in Puglia, is a beautiful archaeological park featuring Roman ruins such as Roman roads and thermal baths. Worth mentioning 12th-century Norman-Swabian Castle in Bari is yet another captivating archeological place. In Emilia-Romagna there are ancient Celtic and Etruscan villages that are perfect spots for archaeological enthusiasts (Emiliaromagnaturismo).

### 1.3.8 Religious Tourism and offer in the eligible area

Religious tourism consists of visiting destinations of religious significance in order to engage in spiritual and religious activities, explore sacred sites and represents one of the oldest forms of tourism. According to UNWTO estimates, 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites every year, with approximately 600 million national and international religious voyages in the world, 40% of which take place in Europe. (UNWTO)

Religious tourism not only contributes to the creation of jobs and the growth of local economies, but is also helping direct investments in logistics infrastructure, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the expansion of recreational opportunities around the world. Regions such as India and Saudi Arabia, which already experience sizeable inflows of religious tourists, have initiated innovative strategies and infrastructure developments aimed at managing visitor flows to prevent over-tourism while fostering room for expansion. Mirroring the digitalization boom observed during the pandemic, technology is increasingly playing a pivotal role in shaping and supporting the evolution of religious tourism.

By the end of 2023, religious tourism across the globe is expected to reach an estimated market value above 15 billion US dollars. The compounded annual growth rate of this tourism market is estimated to be around 10.5% from 2023, reaching 41 billion US dollars in 2033. (Statista, 2023)





The motives for this form of traveling usually involve traveler's will to strengthen faith, gain spiritual enlightenment and connect with the cultural and historical heritage of a particular religion. The key aspects of this form of tourism includes pilgrimages, places of worship, religious festivals, art and architecture related to certain religions, spiritual retreats and many more. It provides a sense of fulfillment and fosters cross-cultural understanding by promoting interactions with people from diverse religious backgrounds. According to the survey, male population dominates, out of a total of 100 respondents, 70 were male and 30 female. Data were collected from different age groups. Large group of respondents (54%) were from 21-30 age group, followed by 27% from 11-20 age group'. (Saha, 2023, Determinants of Religious Tourism: An Empirical Investigation)

According to Kevin J. Wright, director of growth markets at the Kentucky-based National Tour Association, the global faith-based travel sector is worth \$18 billion and includes 300 million travelers a year, the majority well educated and with comfortable incomes. "Studies show that 35 percent of travelers want to take a faith-inspired vacation, so the market potential remains enormous," he says. (Future for Religious Heritage)

In the Italian and Croatian Adriatic coast we can find a diverse range of religious tourism opportunities, catering to travelers of various faiths and beliefs. Even though the primary religion of these regions is Catholicism, religious tourism is not limited only to catholic sites. Visitors of all faiths can find meaningful and spiritually enriching experiences of diverse religious heritage. In Italy 70% of the historical, cultural-architectural, and artistic heritage is kept among: basilicas and churches (around 30,000), diocesan museums (around 700), sanctuaries (around 230), monasteries, convents, and buildings of worship..

Religious tourists are mainly between the ages of 40 and 60, with 31% being between 20 and 40 years old, and 29% comprising those over 60 and under 20. They prefer to travel during spring and autumn, staying one night with



accommodation from 3-star hotels to non-hotels options (Baiocco, S., Religious tourism and the evolution of religious accommodation).

In Italy is located one of the largest churches in the world and most prominent catholic site, St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

The city of Venice possesses 139 churches, among them one of the most significant Roman Catholic Church: St. Mark's Basilica. It is renowned for its folder mosaics and houses the relics of Saint Mark the Evangelist.

Another important pilgrimage site for both Catholics and Orthodox Christians is located in Bari. San Nicola Basilica has the relics of Saint Nicholas and the crypt that serves as the main focus of religious devotion. Tourists in this site include a large proportion of foreigners, particularly Orthodox Christians resident in Italy or visitors arriving from Greece on organized tours, who, as shown by an analysis of the questionnaires, account for 27% of Russian pilgrims. Specifically, in summer, there is an increase in the number of Orthodox day trippers coming from Greece, Croatia and Montenegro. Ship from Montenegro, Sveti Stefan II, total of 13 visits a season, with an average of about 300 passengers per crossing (Katia Rizzello and Ana Trono, The Pilgrimage to The San Nicola Shrine in Bari and its Impact, 2014)

The Sanctuary of Loreto, in the Marche region, is a famous Catholic site believed to house the Holy House of Nazareth where the Virgin Mary Lived. The St. Francis' trail, famous pilgrimage route, has consistently ranked among the top routes in terms of pilgrim numbers in Italy, with over 8,000 pilgrims from 57 nations traveling it in 2022, some 26% more than in 2021. The Umbria region recently received a fund of €6 million for the development of pilgrim trails in its earthquake-stricken areas. (2023, Monica Lisi, italiabsolutely.com).

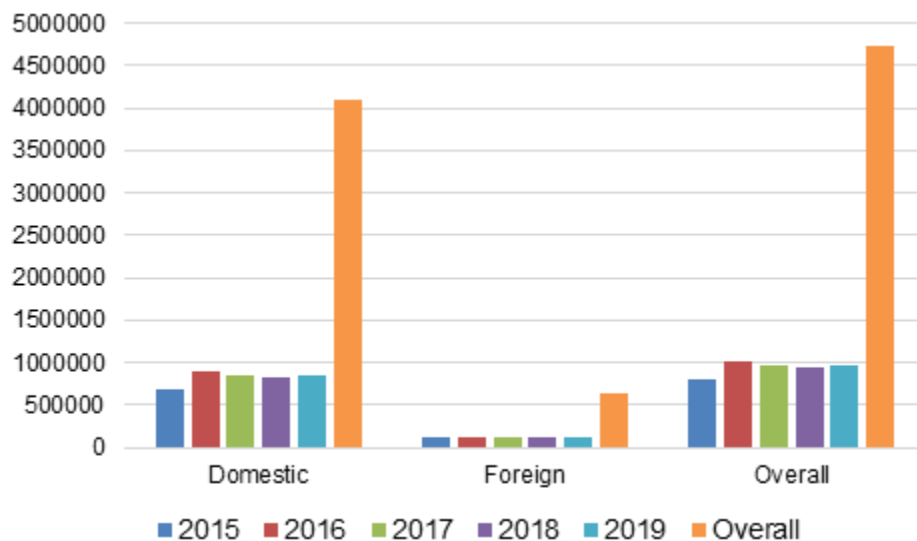
Regarding non-Catholic religious places, we can encounter in Venice one of the oldest Jewish Ghetto in the world. It is a significant Jewish heritage site and includes synagogues, Jewish museums, and cultural landmarks. Additionally, the



Islamic Cultural Center in Ancona provides space for religious and community activities of Muslim population.

According to Nikolina Brnjac, Minister of Tourism and Sports in Croatia, Croatia has a long history of religious tourism based on numerous shrines and sacred objects that attract pilgrims from all over the world, and its importance in the development of sustainable, innovative and resilient tourism has been recognized by the Government of the Republic of Croatia through the National Development strategy until 2030 (2022, Ministry of Tourism and Sport Croatia).

*Analysis of Croatia's national shrine of mother of God Bistrica*



Source: Dora Pisk's creation according to statistical data from the tourist board of Marija municipality Bistrica

The Sanctuary of the Mother of God of Bistrica (Marija Bistrica Shrine) is the largest place of worship in Croatia. According to local tradition, the wooden statue exhibited there was found hanging on a hawthorn tree, which is why the place was named 'Bistrica'. The main attraction of the sanctuary is the Basilica of the Mother of God, which houses the revered statue of Lady of Bistrica, a Black Madonna. According to the Tourist Board of Marija Bistrica Municipality, the shrine made a big step forward in the development of religious tourism, thanks to the development of traditional crafts, preservation of traditions, cooperation



with Slovenian colleagues and attracting money from European funds and yearly estimates more than 900.000 visitors. (Hrčak portal hrvatskih znanstvenih i stručnih časopisa - Ivan Hegeduš, Ivana Koščak )

The Marian Shrine of Trsat in Rijeka is also a popular pilgrimage site dedicated to the Virgin Mary that has around 300,000 visitors annually.

The Sanctuary of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj is another wonderful pilgrimage site that has been a place of solace, hope and spiritual inspiration for visitors. According to data obtained from the Sanctuary, the most frequent tourists are from Romania (with around 1,637 arrivals and 2,156 overnight stays), followed by tourists from Germany (1,311 arrivals and 1,743 overnight stays), Poland (279 arrivals and 274 overnight stays), Italy (137 arrivals and 236 overnight stays), France (101 arrivals and 217 overnight stays) and from other countries (717 arrivals and 1,287 overnight stays). Foreign tourists achieved a total of 4,181 arrivals and 1,287 overnight stays. (Hrčak portal hrvatskih znanstvenih i stručnih časopisa - Ivan Hegeduš, Ivana Koščak)

Other important sites are the Franciscan Monastery in Dubrovnik, that houses a beautiful pharmacy from the 14th century, and the Cathedral of St. Anastasia in Zadar, a splendid example of Romanesque architecture. Talking about non-Catholic sites in Croatia, there are several Orthodox monasteries inland that hold significant spiritual importance. Split has a significant Muslim community and the Islamic Center serves as a cultural hub for them.

### 1.3.9 Shopping and tourism offer in the eligible area

Shopping tourism has become a popular form of tourism with travelers seeking unique shopping experiences, exploring local markets and purchasing items not readily available in their home country. As UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai says, Shopping is becoming an increasingly relevant component of the tourism value chain (UNWTO).



It can take various forms, ranging from luxury shopping in high-end boutiques to local markets and outlets.

Shopping tourism also provides an opportunity to explore local crafts, traditional handicrafts as well as artisanal products that illustrate the cultural heritage of the destination. Souvenir shopping is another important form where tourists purchase mementos and keepsakes that reflect the local culture and traditions of the destinations they are visiting. Visitors often seek authentic, locally made products that highlight the cultural heritage of certain places.

From a natural, artistic, cultural, economic point of view, many countries in Europe have strong elements on which to focus in order to attract luxury visitors. Luxury tourism in Europe, however, expresses much less than its potential. According to an ECCIA study, high-end tourism in Europe is worth between 130 and 170 billion euros (22% of total tourism revenue) and produces an extraordinary multiplier effect, helping to increase every link in the value chain. With just 2% of accommodation providers, for example, high-end tourism: generates almost 22% of overall European tourism revenue; accounts for some 22% of spending on accommodation and for up to 33% of spending on culture, entertainment and shopping. Moreover, daily spending by high-end tourists is 8 times higher than that of the average tourist. The high-end segment also has a multiplier effect on jobs, employing nearly twice the number of staff (compared to lower-end tourism) for the same sized accommodation. The 5 major European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) generate approximately 75% of the value of high-end tourism. (European Cultural and Creative Industries Alliance, 2022)

Along the Adriatic coast, there are numerous offers of delightful blend of unique shopping experience and retail therapy. Both Italy and Croatia have vibrant coastal cities with shopping districts, charming local markets and opportunities to discover traditional crafts and artisanal products.

According to a 2022 survey by Risposte Turismo, shopping tourists in Italy could exceed two million in 2023, surpassing the 2019 results. One of the main



reasons some tourists decide to vacation in Italy is for shopping. Italy ranks second in Europe after the United Kingdom for number of sales structures. The over 600 Italian shopping tourists surveyed were mainly from the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, and 54% of them said that they have shopping as the main reason for their visit to Italy, and 14% of them indicated shopping as one of the prevailing activities during their stay, thus demonstrating the general strength of the tourism and shopping combination among demand. They spend on average over 100 euros daily especially on clothing, leather goods and cosmetics and perfumery. Other factors included in this choice are discounts, sales and promotions (67%), proximity to attractions or places of interest (38%), the presence of local, typical, unique products (34%), the commercial offer (31%) and available services (26%). One of the most praised features of shopping in Italy is the vicinity of shops to Italian cities' historic centres or main roads and attractions (61%), people then tend to shop in shopping centres (49%) and outlets (41%). At the same time, three out of five tourists make purchases at stations and airports.

In the Italian Adriatic Coast, Venice has numerous shopping sites, and it is known for its intricate Venetian glass and handmade masks as well as artisan workshops where visitors can find unique souvenirs and local crafts. In Burano, we can find exquisite lace-making traditions and colorful authentic souvenirs, whereas in the Rialto Market, fresh produce and local specialties can be encountered.



Source: [tourisminvenice.com](http://tourisminvenice.com), Martina Vidal Venezia

Rimini's shopping scene combines trendy fashion boutiques and lively street markets. The Borgo San Giuliano area is known for its artsy boutiques and street art. hopping tourism in Rimini is widely attributed to the increase in Russian tourists to the region since the end of the Millennium. In fact, Rimini International Airport started a campaign to become the first Italian hub for charter flights from the Russian Federation as far back as 1993. By 2011 Russians had become the largest international group visiting the Province of Rimini, and their numbers increased further in 2012, representing 24.7% of the total number of foreign arrivals and 22.2% of foreign overnight visitors.



Source:italia.it (Borgo San Giuliano)

The port city of Ancona has both upscale fashion stores and local markets with fresh seafood, fruits and vegetables. The Marche region practices a sustainable form of shopping tourism from world brands at a low price. As Frontiers Journal suggests, Shopping tourism is currently one of the main strategic lines of countries to promote sustainable and quality tourism. One of the examples is Macerata Glamour Store with a 70% discount. Region Marche is famous for its widest range of shoes; GISA shoe boutique is the perfect place to go. Moreover, Ascoli Piceno has small factories around the city which are known for their handmade shoes. For market lovers, Fontanellato features a wide range of antiques products (Orange Smile.com).

Speaking of Croatia, Professor Terry Stevens from the Metropolitan University, an expert with 50 years of experience in tourism, believes that Croatia does a very good job with the presentation of emotions and stories, two crucial segments in selling goods to tourists (Lider.com).



Nevenka Fuchs from the Tourist Board of the City of Zagreb says that twenty-three percent of one-day visitors to Zagreb consider shopping a priority. On average, a one-day visitor spends 27 euros, and those who stay in hotels for several days spend 14 euros per day (Lider.com) This demonstrates that Croatia has high potential for this type of tourism, but is not using enough of it considering fantastic growing rate of tourists each year and wide range of products available to sell.

In Dubrovnik, the famous Stradun Street serves as a vibrant shopping hub, hosting a great variety of shops selling local products, jewelry and souvenirs. Also, the open-air market is an excellent place to find traditional Croatian crafts and fresh products. In the city of Split, there is a great mixture of modern shopping malls, trendy boutiques and traditional markets. The Green Market (Pazar) is the perfect spot to buy local products. Likewise, in Zadar and Rijeka, there are large shopping malls like Supernova and ZTC mall as well as handicraft stores. The island of Hvar is known for its lavender products, artisanal goods and boutique stores.





Out of 642 observed reviews on TripAdvisor, the presented places are put as the best one, receiving more than 4,5 stars, respectively 593 reviews left for Aura Distillery gift shop, 239 for Green Market in Split, 227 for Mall of Split and 123 for Arena Centar.

### 1.3.10 Traditional Music, Local Festivals and tourism offers in the eligible area

Traditional music and festival tourism are closely linked and offer travelers a unique experience of cultural heritage and vibrant festivities of different regions and communities. According to the ResearchGate Portal, it is believed that the synergy of traditional music, costumes and dances is ranked first in the appeal of traditional music as a tourism product (Stipanović, Christian & Rudan, Elena & Zubovic, Vedran, The role of traditional music in tourist destination development, 2020)

Traditional music, often rooted in the history and customs of a specific culture, holds important value in preserving and passing down cultural identities from one generation to another. Festivals showcase the essence of a community's traditions, including dance, art, music and so on. According to a study by the World Travel Market, the global music tourism market is expected to reach \$11.5 billion by 2028.

Moreover, according to a new survey by online travel agency eDreams, music is a key driver when it comes to why millennials choose a vacation destination (Travel Agent Central).

Traditional music and festivals indeed create immersive and enriching travel experiences because it is an essential part of a community's identity. There are also usually presented music workshops, allowing tourists to learn about traditional musical instruments and participate in performances. According to UNWTO, it is believed that music tourism can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specially Goal 8, Target 8.9 "by 2030



devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products”.

According to Sound Diplomacy, there is a clear connection between music and tourism, for instance the most recent example is the 45% increase in the intent of travel to Puerto Rico as a result of the success of the song Despacito by Luis Fonsi last year or Brand USA are using music as their primary tourism driver in 2018 and 2019, following Pro Colombia’s use of music in 2017. More companies are offering bespoke music tourism experiences, from Beats Travel to Spain Live Music, Travel for the Arts and Loudwire.

Other crucial statistical data that they estimated are the following: the average music tourist spends a minimum of \$300 USD on travel costs and 72% of millennials at festivals are likely to go to the local shop or restaurant to purchase food/beverages they were introduced to at said festival. This is significantly higher than much of other forms of traveling, suggesting that tourism with music purpose can indeed yield development in respective fields.

A captivating journey of traditional music along the Adriatic coast of Italy and Croatia is filled with rich heritage and traditions. Both countries have a long history of traditional music that reflects the diverse influences of their unique histories and regional identities. As identified in the documents of **FrameSport European Projects** (Deliverables of PP6 for Marche Region) travellers can discover various music festivals, cultural events, local music with traditional instruments and artistic expressions also in the province of Pesaro-Urbino.

In Croatia, according to Congress Tourism & Hospitality Industry 2020 in Opatija, the most common way of incorporating music into tourism are “folklore festivals (63% of responses in the Kvarner region and 58% in Istria), cultural-artistic events (24% in the Kvarner region, 26% in Istria) and traditional music concerts (14% in the Kvarner region, 16% in Istria). Good examples of the inclusion of traditional music in the destinations’ offerings are events such as the Krk Island Folklore Festival, Rapska Fjera (medieval festival held on Rab Island), TradInEtno (a festival of traditional and ethnic music held in Pazin), the Traditional Istrian



Music and Dancing Festival and Zakantajmo istrijanske kante (Let's Sing Istrian Songs).



Source: livecamcroatia.com (Ultra Festival)

Split has seen meteoric rises in music tourists, by over 100x over the past 5 years (Sound Diplomacy and ProColombia). The Ultra Summer Festival in Split is a famous electronic dance music festival held annually. UK Awards proclaimed this festival in 2011 as the best festival in Europe. Management Ultra carried out the research and estimated that about 63% of Ultra attendees are foreigners, and the average duration of their stay in Croatia during the event is approximately 6.4 days. On average, these visitors spend 143 euros per day, making them one of the biggest consumers on the Adriatic. Interestingly, 72% of them explore other cities beyond Split. When it comes to accommodation choices, 29% opt for hotels, 37% for apartments, 14% for camping and 9% sleep on boats. (Sasa Jadrijevic-Tomas, Slobodna Dalmacija, 2019).

Furthermore, Dubrovnik Summer Festival is an iconic event with various artistic performances of traditional music and dances. Also, the Omis Pirate Battle is a unique event where locals reenact historic pirate battles accompanied by traditional Dalmatian music. This festival celebrates the city's maritime history and folklore.



Source: Central Dalmatia blog (Omisi Pirate Battle)

There is also a cappella music specific to the Dalmatian coast called Klapa singing. Travelers can experience this soulful and melodious singing style at various local events around the region.

Additionally, the combination of traditional music and culinary delights can be found in the Istria Gourmet Festival where visitors have a chance to experience rich cultural heritage through local gastronomy and traditional music. Worth mentioning Beer Fest in Zagreb has a variety of 180 beer offers.

One of the oldest national festivals as well as in Europe, Pula Film Festival, showcases cinematography and national films. The number of visitors each year is increasing, the total number of spectators was 22,518 in 2022, and 2023 notes increased by 11,094, 49%. (Pula Film Festival.com)

*Important factors for music tourism in Kvarner and Istra region*

	Kvarner region		Istria region	
	Average	Std.dev.	Average	Std.dev.
Importance of traditional music in the overall tourism offering	4.10	0.78	4.40	0.81
Overall tourism offering of the	3.00	0.93	2.70	0.95



destination				
Inclusion of traditional music in the overall offering	3.10	0.99	2.60	1.17
Inclusion of traditional music in overall promotion	2.90	1.35	2.50	1.07
Level of preference of tourists for traditional music	3.00	0.71	4.10	0.90
Level of preference of residents for traditional music	3.60	0.73	3.30	0.82
Level of preference of young people	2.80	0.67	2.60	1.01

Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Scores-given-by-CASs-to-the-valorisation-of-traditional-music-in-tourism\\_tbl1\\_342832572](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Scores-given-by-CASs-to-the-valorisation-of-traditional-music-in-tourism_tbl1_342832572)

Italy too has a profound influence on musical heritage with numerous traditional and international festivals, concerts and performances. Venice Carnival is just one example of a cultural event that attracts thousands of tourists every year in February. According to Statista, last year (2022) Venice welcomed nearly 200 thousand domestic and international tourist arrivals in February (Statista)

Another important cultural event in Venice is the Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious art exhibitions in the world. Statista reports demonstrate that the 2021 event welcomed nearly 299 thousand visitors, surpassing the attendance reported in 2018 (approximately 275 thousand visitors). Significant aspect of Biennale is that it also features pavilions representing over 90 different countries, giving it a strong international cultural nature.

Regarding music festivals, The Taranda Festival is one famous event held in the Salento region of Puglia. It celebrates the traditional music of the folk dance 'tarantella', so called because it is believed to cure the bite of the tarantula spider. The festival features performances by local musicians, dancers and workshops on traditional musical instruments.





According to Journal of Tourism & Hospitality, The Festival Della Valle d'Itria, annual festival held in Puglia, attracts 20% more visitors in Puglia. This festival is well-known for showcasing opera performances, chamber music concerts and other classical music events. Also worth mentioning is the Festival della Musica Antica in Urbino, Festa del Duca, which revives the Renaissance-age Montefeltro family.



## 5. GOOD PRACTICES AND CASE HISTORIES

### 4.1 EXAMPLES OF TOURISM OFFER, AND ATTRACTIONS DEDICATED OR ADAPTED FOR TRAVELERS WITH ANIMALS AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

Initiative of the European Union presents several well-done practices that help people with impairment and disabilities to navigate themselves. By the same token, Travelunity explores most pet-friendly places and its suitability for travelers with animals.

**Bordeaux:** An Inclusive City: Bordeaux stands out as a model of inclusivity, with certified accessible routes, tactile maps for the visually impaired, and a constantly updated guide for people with disabilities. The city ensures major events are accessible and adapts venues with ramps, accessible restrooms, and assistance for those with reduced mobility. Bordeaux exemplifies inclusive urban planning<sup>2</sup>

**València:** València actively participates in the MITOMED beach project, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to delivering a sustainable and accessible beach experience. The city's beaches are now equipped with walkways and accessibility features, which are subject to continuous evaluation and improvement. These efforts align with the best practices in accessibility, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their physical capabilities, can enjoy a day at the beach in València.

**Netherlands Railway:** The Netherlands Railway system is a vital part of the country's transportation infrastructure. While specific accessibility practices and initiatives may vary, the Netherlands is known for its overall commitment to making public transport accessible for people with disabilities

**Swiss Banking Accessibility:** Switzerland, known for its precision and attention to detail, extends these qualities to its banking sector. Swiss banks are likely to

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<sup>2</sup> Accessibility. Bordeaux Tourism & Conventions. (2023).



have implemented stringent accessibility measures to ensure that their services are available to all, including those with visual impairments<sup>3</sup>.

**Audio Libraries in Norway:** Audio libraries in Norway are likely to provide services that cater to individuals with visual impairments. These services may include audiobooks, audio descriptions, and other features to enhance accessibility for visually impaired individuals. Norway is known for its commitment to accessibility and inclusion, so these audio libraries are likely to reflect those values in their offerings.

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<sup>3</sup> *Accessibility*. Credit Suisse. (2023.).





## **4.2 RELEVANT GOOD PRACTICES IN ITALY AND CROATIA**

### **Innovative Spoken Tourist Map in Istria that enhanced inclusive tourism**

The Association of the Blind in the Istrian County, in collaboration with the Society of Tourist Guides of Pula, implemented the projects “The sound of little Tuscany” and “The colors of inclusive tourism”, within which was created a Spoken tourist guide about Istria in Croatian and Italian language for visually impaired and blind people. The permanent map includes 134 tourist locations with historical-cultural monuments of the Istrian peninsula and is available on the telephone. President Zlatko Kuftic highlighted its accessibility via phone, with charges supporting the association's initiatives. Kuftic praised improved accessibility but noted the need for more consideration. Notable efforts include exhibitions at Pazin City Museum and Pula’s Sacred Hearts tailored for the visually impaired. With approximately 279 members, mostly in Pula, and around 300 visually impaired individuals in Istria, the project addresses an ongoing need for inclusivity.



### **VISITUS Project**

The VISITUS initiative, funded by Croatia-Serbia’s cross-border program, is revolutionizing tourism for the visually impaired. With tactile sensor panels, GPS apps and braille guides, the project enriches experiences. 28 tourist spots have been made accessible, backed by voice guidance and touch technology. The

project empowers visually impaired individuals with tools like ultrasonic wands and devices, enabling unique explorations. This technology-driven effort showcases the potential of inclusive tourism and modernizes the travel landscape.

### **Medvednica Nature Park project – Bliznec Forest Trail**

Croatia has achieved a significant milestone by being featured in the UNWTO's compendium of best practices for accessible and inclusive tourism in natural areas. The inclusion highlights the Medvednica Nature Park's "Bliznec Forest Trail", an innovative project fully tailored to individuals with special needs. The trail integrates educational boards and braille texts. This recognition underscores Croatia's commitment to responsible and modern inclusive tourism and the Croatian National Tourist Board's collaboration with UNWTO and local partners. Croatia's tourism director, Kristjan Stanicic, expressed pride in this accomplishment, enhancing the nation's reputation as a welcoming destination for all.



### **Inclusive Art Experience: Ruzic Gallery's Interactive Guide**

The "I see, hear, feel art" project has brought accessibility to the forefront at Slavonski Brod's Ruzic and Contemporaries Gallery." This innovative initiative introduces an interactive guide for the visually impaired, using modern technology to provide audio descriptions of artworks. With a focus on social

inclusion, the project enhances cultural engagement and independence for those with disabilities, setting a remarkable example of collaboration between the gallery, technology companies and disability organizations.

### **The Euphrasian Basilica-religious tourism:**

The USEFALL (UNESCO Site Experience For All) project offers accessibility features like braille descriptions of mosaics and specially trained guides. This Basilica is perfect example of fostering an environment of inclusive tourism and preventing social exclusion. The project aims to make the rich UNESCO cultural heritage as accessible as possible for all, regardless of different needs or impaired mobility. In addition to the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč, the project also included the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, the Botanical Garden in Padua, the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice, the Archaeological Site and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia and Diocletian's Palace in Split.

### **Tactile gallery for the blind in Zagreb**

Zagreb's Modern Gallery hosts the world's first tactile gallery since 2009. Tactile diagrams on glass and detailed audio descriptions create an immersive art experience for visually impaired visitors; "The methodology is based on the creation of tactile diagrams printed in glass, who analyze and translate the image by dividing it into five different layers (five tactile diagrams) into composition, depth, light, details and color, which only read together they bring the whole picture"





### **Typological Museum Zagreb**

This museum is uniquely designed to cater to the needs of the visually impaired community. It incorporates tactile exhibits, auditory descriptions and accessibility features that allow visually impaired visitors to engage with the displayed content in a meaningful way.

### **Isola Tour Association in Venice**

This organization of tour guides in Venice focuses on providing accessible and inclusive cultural experience for individuals with visual impairment. They specialize in creating guided tours and activities that cater to the needs of visually impaired visitors. One of the examples of its initiative is the collaboration with The Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia together with the Italian Union of the Blind to offer free sensory-rich activities for the visually impaired. The initiative includes tactile visits and workshops that utilize museum-provided aids.

### **The Omero Tactile Museum of Ancona**

This museum in the Marche region is specifically designed for visually impaired people. It features sculptures and artworks that can be touched and explored



through touch-based exhibitions. It offers guided tours conducted by trained staff who provide detailed descriptions and context for the artwork. The museum also organizes educational workshops that focus on artistic expression and creativity. In addition to physical exhibitions, the Omero Museum is actively involved in outreach and collaboration with cultural institutions, schools and organizations.



### **Stamperia Braille Catania**

It is an interesting place located in Catania that holds historical significance. This printing store produces materials in braille and offers educational materials, books and other resources for people who use braille.



### **Cammino Materano:**

Cammino Materano is a unique and enriching walking route from Bari to Matera holds a number of features that make it particularly suitable for visually impaired individuals. The route encompasses various sensory elements such as

tactile maps and signage and textures of ancient serene architecture, natural landscape and cultural artifacts can be felt through touch. Trained guides provide audio descriptions and detailed explanations of surroundings. Moreover, the sounds of flowing water and scents of surrounding flora contribute to a multisensory journey.

### **The Magic Cube Bevanella Visitor Centre**

The Magic Cube Bevanella Visitor Centre near Ravenna is a unique spot suitable for visually impaired visitors. It's close to nature areas ideal for birdwatching. The tour focuses on the area's distinctive flora and fauna. Also, at the Classic Museum, you'll explore Ravenna's history and mosaic-making. The tour is inclusive, offering tandem bikes and an interactive app for visually impaired visitors, ensuring everyone can enjoy the experience fully.



### **Blind Dinner Verona:**

Dining in a completely dark room is an extraordinary sensory experience that leaves a lasting impression, organized with the help of the Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired of Verona. It involves eating in complete darkness, preventing you from seeing your meal. This unique experience richness senses and approaches food in a more profound way. I want to share my experience organizing

### **Museums in Venice: Museo Correr, National Archeological Museum of Venice and Archeological Museum of Torcello**

The "Bronzetto Exhibition Path" at the Museum Correr offers a highly accessible experience for visitors. Inside the designated areas, there are openable showcases containing tactile bronze sculptures from the 1400-1600 period, allowing hands-on exploration. The path is marked and easy to navigate, with handrails and relief maps for guidance.



## CONCLUSION

This report is considered to be the groundwork of the entire project. All partners are active in the tourism dynamics of the Croatian and Italian eligible project areas, with strong experience in dealing with deeply different stakeholders, making networks among them, creating tourism itineraries, analyzing and researching the status and context where the work must be done. This strong experience made partners aware that further research on the two specific targets of the project was essential.

This report created therefore the **foundations of the whole project** first of all by increasing the partners' awareness and knowledge on the theme, secondly creating a useful tool **to make stakeholders aware of the opportunities the project is going to create using the data and info it contains in the focus groups presentations (D1.1.2)**, later in **the training sessions (D1.2.1)** and also **in the dissemination activities of the project**.

Notably, the research **identified 10 relevant themes** according to the offer of the eligible and project area and to the targets' needs. The themes were essential to later discuss the itineraries opportunities directly with the targets (D1.1.3) and will be used to start creating itineraries. The research identified also some **useful data on the potential market which made possible raising awareness among potential future stakeholders** during project presentations and while later making the training sessions (D1.2.1). Finally, the research lists and deepens the two targets and their special needs which will be strongly considered while creating the itineraries and while training the stakeholders.





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