



European
Commission

Bringing nature and adventure tourism to the coast

(Sesimbra, Portugal)

Two young nature lovers have built an innovative tourism company, allowing them to earn a living in their small coastal community while bringing new, sustainable activities to the area.

Among the activities offered by this company are dolphin watching, boat trips, snorkelling and, most notably, the activity known as “coasteering”, which consists of coastal routes that combine canyoning, cliff jumping and zip-lining. The FLAG-supported enterprise, Vertente Natural, is the first company in Portugal to offer “coasteering” and receives bookings from countries across Europe and beyond.

ADREPES LAG supported the creation of Vertente Natural in 2004 and has since continued to play an active, guiding role at key moments during the company’s development. Regular contact has meant the FLAG has been able to advise the local business of opportunities offered by different European funds that match its needs. Following a start-up grant, the FLAG then helped Vertente Natural expand its offer from land-based tours in the Arrabida Natural Park to tourist products linked to the area’s maritime assets and coastal heritage. In particular, it supported the acquisition of canoeing, rappelling and slide equipment and, subsequently, investments into an online marketing and booking platform. The company has continued to diversify its set of activities with support for further nautical equipment and, most recently in 2023, with a grant for improved service infrastructure in the Port of Sesimbra.



Today, Vertente Natural attracts approximately 30 000 national and international tourists annually to enjoy and learn about the coastline of this small municipality near Lisbon. As well as creating a new economic activity in the area, the project has allowed local young people (many of them former tourism students and/or with nature degrees from the nearby University of Lisbon) to stay in the municipality thanks to year-round jobs. As such, it is building on the existing human capital in the area to promote its natural assets and cultural heritage to visitors. This ranges from information on the area’s natural environment to the local fishing culture and practices. As part of the experience visitors, for example, can taste local food products, such as the *fariña torrada*, while hearing about the history of that typical high-protein snack that fishers traditionally take on their boats.

Results:

- The launch of a new business based on local natural and maritime heritage, attracting visitors from highly touristic areas nearby, such as Lisbon.
- The creation of 14 full-time, year-round jobs, plus 10 seasonal jobs (May-October) created among local youngsters.
- The provision of a high added-value, innovative and sustainable tourism offer in Sesimbra year-round.
- The development of an informal network between the adventure-tourism sector and other tourism stakeholders, such as hotels and restaurants, to strengthen the brand of Sesimbra as a touristic destination.



Transferability and Tips:

Do:

- Prioritise sustainable and high-quality tourism over mass tourism.
- Consider the long-term development of local companies and stay accessible for ongoing guidance and support.
- Seek the visibility of the tourist activities outside the local area.
- Focus investments on activities that bring the most impact for the local area.

Don't:

- Don't look at companies offering similar services as competitors. Remember you share a common objective!
- Don't forget to work in partnership with other tourist operators and complementary sectors, such as accommodation, transport, food shops and restaurants. The outcome achieved through this informal network may be greater than you think!
- If you support projects focused on tourism, make sure that they do not contribute to the overcrowding of territories or to increasing the seasonality of employment and tourism.



Quote from project promoter/beneficiary

“Nowadays, people are not only interested in the city, they like to get to know the little corners of the country and to accumulate adventurous experiences. Normally, this type of work is seasonal but here many of us are working all year round. Although for me it's not really work! It's a pleasure to enjoy nature and the sea with people!”

Henrique Piugo, tourist guide in Vertente Natural

Project cost and funding

Total project cost:

€285 223

FLAG grant:

€157 509 (55% of total project cost)

Beneficiary contribution:

€127 714 (45% of total project cost)

Implementation duration

2004-2005 (LEADER), 2011-2012 (EFF), 2023 (EMFF)

Beneficiary

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