

HOW TO BECOME A EUROPARC SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION













1.THE VISION, MISSION AND PRINCIPLES

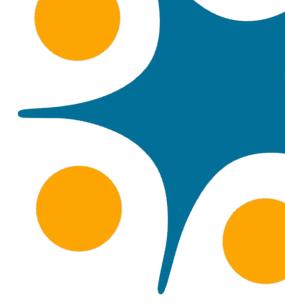
of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The EUROPARC Federation is the network of European Protected Areas, dedicated to practical nature conservation and sustainable development. People love parks and tourism is a major economic driver. **EUROPARC created the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas**, as a management tool, to ensure a viable and healthy future for people and for nature in our living, working and visited landscapes. These guidelines will explain this internationally recognised process to enable your areas to **become a Sustainable Destination**.

VISION

Sustainable Tourism in European Protected Areas provides a meaningful quality experience, safeguards natural and cultural values, supports local livelihoods and quality of life and is economically viable.





PRINCIPLES

The following principles should govern how tourism is developed and managed in Protected Areas:

1. Giving priority to protection

A fundamental priority for the development and management of sustainable tourism should be to protect the area's natural and cultural heritage and to enhance awareness, understanding, and appreciation of it.

2. Contributing to sustainable development

Sustainable Tourism should follow the principles of sustainable development which means addressing all aspects of its environmental, social and economic impact in the short and long term.

3. Engaging all stakeholders

All those affected by sustainable tourism should be able to participate in decisions about its development and management, and Partnership working should be encouraged.

4. Planning sustainable tourism effectively

Sustainable Tourism development and management should be guided by a well-researched plan that sets out agreed objectives and actions.

5. Pursuing continuous improvement

Tourism development and management should deliver ongoing improvement in sustainable environmental impacts, visitor satisfaction, economic performance, local prosperity and quality of life, requiring regular monitoring and reporting of progress and results.

QUALITY SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WILL BE GOOD FOR PARKS AND GOOD FOR PEOPLE.

2.COMPONENTS

of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas











The Charter requires that all Protected Areas have all the components in place.

The components of the Charter involve

- working in Partnership
- preparing and implementing a strategy
- addressing the key topics
- evaluating
- reviewing work achieved
- establishing partnerships
- and celebrating success!



Permanent
Sustainable
Tourism Forum

A Permanent Sustainable Tourism Forum, or equivalent arrangement, should be established between the Protected Area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism businesses.

The permanent forum is the most important component of the Charter ensuring a participative and inclusive approach and a direct engagement of stakeholders, to enable effective discourse and decision making.

Links with regional and national bodies should be developed and maintained. The Forum should also engage with other Forums in the Charter Network, to learn from others and develop new ideas and models of working.

A **Strategy and Action Plan** for Sustainable Tourism should be prepared, including three main elements:

- an assessment of the current situation;
- a strategic direction;
- a practical action plan.

The strategy and action plan are based on:

- inclusive and effective consultation and is approved by local stakeholders;
- covers a **five-year period** (with some flexibility to allow for different planning cycles);
- is a separate, self-contained document.





The Strategy and Action Plan should contain:

A definition of the area to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the Protected Area.



An **assessment** of:

- The area's natural, historic and cultural heritage;
- The area's tourism and recreation infrastructure;
- Current visitors and potential future markets;
- Impacts of tourism on the environment, economy and local communities;
- Issues of capacity, need and opportunity associated with the above:
- A SWOT analysis.



A set of **strategic objectives** for the development and management of tourism, covering:

- · conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage;
- economic and social development;
- preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents;
- visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered.



- An action plan to meet these objectives, which must address the key topics and actions set out later in Section 3. The action plan must contain:
 - a description of each action and an identification of those responsible for it:
 - An estimation of resources and indication of Partners to implement the action plan;
 - Proposals for monitoring results.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Defining clear strategic objectives concerning nature conservation, economic and social development, improving quality of life of locals and quality of tourism.

ACTION

each action: timing, resources, Partners for implementing, monitoring proposal with indicators and results.



Protected Areas, Business Partners and Tour Operators that have been awarded the Charter join the Network of Sustainable Destinations, the largest, and oldest European network of its kind!

Protected Areas, business Partners and Tour Operators awarded are required to communicate and make visible their award. **They receive the right to use EUROPARC logotype, which is available in several languages, during the valid period of their award.** To ensure communications are effective, awardees need to comply with the Graphic Guidelines.

At a local level, Protected Areas are encouraged to follow a Partnership approach in developing and managing sustainable tourism. At international level, Destinations and Partners are also encouraged to engage in networking and communication events and processes. Active engagement and networking will provide the best opportunity to get new ideas, learn from others, save time and money in developing sustainable tourism in your area.







The logos and Graphic Guidelines are available for download at: www.europarc.org/logo-and-graphic-guidelines

The Charter process itself makes provision for the development and recognition of Partnerships between Protected Area authorities and tourism businesses through the award of the **Charter Partner status** to tourism businesses that meet agreed criteria under:

Engagement of Protected Areas with Part II or Part III of the Charter is optional, but highly recommended.

Part II - Business Partners

for local tourism businesses and

Part III - Sustainable Tour Operators

for tourism agencies and Tour Operators.



The evaluation process, including engagement with an expert verifier and receipt of their report, provides the Protected Area with valuable feedback and views on their sustainable tourism activity.





All Protected Areas seeking award of the Charter must engage in and facilitate the evaluation process.

This involves:

- Submission of a completed application / re-evaluation form, the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, and any other supporting material, which will be checked by an appointed external verifier who is an expert in sustainable tourism and Protected Areas.
- A visit to the area by the verifier, which will include a programme of meetings and discussion with relevant stakeholders.
- **Preparation of a report by the verifier**. A version of this is subsequently made available to the Protected Area.
- Assessment of the application and the verifier's report by the Charter Evaluation Committee, which makes a recommendation to the EUROPARC Council on whether to award the Charter, including any conditions or comments to pass on to the Protected Area.
- Subsequent attention to any matters raised by the verifier, evaluation committee and Council.

Monitoring actions and impacts of sustainable tourism

should be built into the process from the beginning, leading to review and adaptation. This helps keep track of progress and celebrate success!

The Action Plan should contain **indicators and monitoring actions** which cover: Progress with the implementation of actions; Results and changes in tourism performance and impacts.

Key data from the monitoring should be submitted to EUROPARC as part of an overall benchmarking and assessment of the Charter process as a whole.

> The Charter is awarded for a period of five years. Local exceptions can apply if requested and agreed.

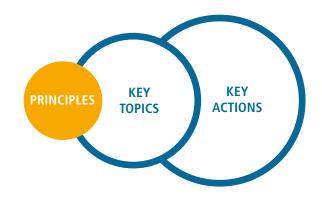


3.KEY TOPICS & ACTIONS

of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan should be based on the local context and priorities as assessed and agreed through the consultation process.

However, to comply with the requirements of the Charter, it must demonstrate coverage of the following key topics and associated actions in the Action Plan.





KEY TOPICS	KEY ACTIONS
1) Protecting valuable landscapes, biodiversity, and cultural heritage	 Influencing land use planning and the control of potentially damaging developments; Influencing the location, type and design of tourism developments; Managing visitor flows, activities and behavior in sensitive areas and sites.
2) Supporting conservation through tourism	 Encouraging visitors and tourism businesses to support conservation, through donations, volunteering, and other activity; Using revenues obtained from tourism-related activity to support conservation; Establishing, supporting and promoting tourism-related investments, projects and activities that help to conserve the natural and cultural heritage.
3) Reducing carbon footprint, pollution, and wasteful resource use	1) Working with tourism businesses to improve environmental management, including the use of energy and water, waste management, and noise and light pollution; 2) Promoting the use of public transport and other alternatives to cars.
4) Providing safe access, quality facilities and special experiences of the Protected Area, available to all visitors	 Providing a wide range of access opportunities, with attention to safety and risk management; Improving the quality of visitor facilities and services; Providing visitors with specific tourism offers which involve discovery, interpretation and appreciation of the area's special natural and cultural heritage; Providing facilities and information for visitors with special needs.
5) Effectively communicating the area to visitors	 Ensuring that marketing materials and activities promote the area effectively and responsibly; Providing good quality and effective visitor information and interpretation; Ensuring that tourism businesses and other local stakeholders are well informed about the area and provide relevant and accurate information to visitors; Providing specific information and interpretation for young people, schools and student groups.
6) Ensuring social cohesion	 Anticipating, monitoring and minimising any existing and potential conflicts with local residents; Maintaining good communication and engagement between local residents, businesses, visitors and the Protected Area authority; Encouraging and developing appropriate Partnership activity with and between stakeholders.
7) Strengthening prosperity in the local community	 Promoting the provision and identity of local produce and services and their purchase and use by visitors and tourism businesses; Supporting the economic viability and performance of local tourism businesses and the provision of local employment in tourism.
8) Providing training and capacity building	 Providing relevant training for staff of the Protected Area authority in sustainable tourism development and management; Providing and encouraging relevant training and capacity building for tourism businesses and other stakeholders in sustainable tourism.
9) Monitoring tourism performance and impacts	 Monitoring of visitors – volumes, patterns, spending and satisfaction; Monitoring of tourism businesses – performance and needs; Monitoring of tourism impacts – on the environment, economy and community; Monitoring progress in implementing the action plan.
10) Communicating actions and engaging with the Charter	 Communicating sustainable tourism actions and results to local stakeholders and more widely at a local, regional and national level; Promoting and making visible the award of the Charter; Engaging with EUROPARC and the Charter Network, including participating in related events and activities; Taking steps for re-application and renewal of the Charter.

4.SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PARTNERS

Charter Part II

The engagement of local businesses is vital to the effective development and management of sustainable tourism.



Local businesses must be represented on the Permanent Sustainable Tourism Forum and be involved in the preparation and implementation of the sustainable tourism strategy and action plan.

A recommended development of the Charter, is to enable certain tourism businesses working in Partnership with the Protected Area authority to receive individual recognition under the Part II of the Charter.

Eligible business can apply for the EUROPARC STAR Awards to recognise their contribution to sustainable tourism in their area.



Part II is only available to businesses in Sustainable Destinations that have been awarded the Charter under Part I and are within the five-year period of the certificate.

The Charter Part II is a process led directly by the Protected Area authority, through a methodology approved by the EUROPARC Federation. They are therefore responsible to invite Partners, review applications, evaluate the Partners' performance and award the Business Partners Certificate.

It is up to the Protected Area authority to decide whether to implement Part II and offer it as an option to its businesses.

The certificate for Business Partners is valid for a period of three years, which can be renewed for equal periods.

Charter Part II is valid in the countries that have an approved methodology previously submitted to EUROPARC. Information about the current countries implementing Charter Part II is available at europarc.org/sustainable-business-Partners.

Protected Area authorities that wish to pursue Part II of the Charter should contact EUROPARC to clarify the situation pertaining in their country and what may be required.

In countries where the methodology is not implemented, EUROPARC highly encourages Protected Areas to submit their own methodology, inspired by the existing ones. Technical support and guidance is available.

REQUIREMENTS

The overall requirements of EUROPARC for Partners are that recognised tourism businesses should:

- Commit to the vision, mission and principles of the Charter:
- Relate to the local sustainable tourism forum and
- Support the implementation of the sustainable tourism strategy and action plan;
- Demonstrate compliance with relevant quality and sustainability criteria or certifications;
- Have their own sustainability management plan for their business that is agreed with the Protected Area authority;
- Maintain close relationships with the Protected Area authority and other businesses and stakeholders engaged with the Charter.

These requirements are further interpreted and developed by different countries to suit their local circumstances.

Individual businesses with an interest in Sustainable Tourism should contact their Protected Area authority.

5.SUSTAINABLE TOUR OPERATORS

Charter Part III

Having created Sustainable
Destinations with public, businesses
and communities working together,
agreeing sustainable practices with
Tour Operators who bring visitors
to the Protected Areas, completes the
sustainable tourism charter cycle.







Part III is only available to agencies and Tour Operators in

Sustainable Destinations that have been awarded the Charter under Part I and are within the five-year period of the certificate.

Tour Operators should also be engaged in Partnership working with Protected Area authorities, communities and local businesses.

Tour Operators working under this framework will agree to work in Partnership with the authority responsible for the strategy in the Protected Area and the local tourist service providers. This will involve **analysing the compatibility of its products** with the objectives of the area.

The visitor flow they attract to an area must respect and not damage the heritage resources that the tourists come to see.

The **French and Spanish EUROPARC sections** have led the way in promoting and implementing the methodology to award sustainable practices of Tour Operators working in Protected Areas.

Other countries and EUROPARC sections can propose their own methodology, based on the examples from France or Spain.

ELIGIBILITY

- Incoming agencies and operators working in the area of the Sustainable Destination:
- International and National agencies and Tour Operators working with sustainable and ecotourism programmes, willing to prepare special packages in EUROPARC Sustainable Destinations.

Agencies and Tour Operators with an interest in developing sustainable tourism packages should contact their Protected Area authority directly.

For international agencies, please contact the EUROPARC Federation at sustainable.tourism@europarc.org

6.TERMS & CONDITIONS

How to become a Sustainable Destination step-by-step: technical guidelines, timings and submission guidance for Part I

1. ENSURE YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE EUROPARC FEDERATION

The EUROPARC Federation, who owns and manages the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a member association and as such, all charter areas are required to be **members of the EUROPARC Federation**, in good standing with membership fee payments.

Protected Areas which are not already EUROPARC members will be requested to join the Federation upon registering as candidate Protected Areas.







2. REGISTER FOR THE CHARTER AND PAY THE REGISTRATION FEE

- Download the ECST Registration Form from website: europarc.org/become-a-sustainable-destination
- Send the Registration Form completed, dated and signed to sustainable.tourism@europarc.org
- EUROPARC is registered in Germany and we need to check
 if the applicant organisation is required /or is exempt from
 VAT (@7%) for the payment of the fee. We will make that c
 heck, with the tax authorities in Germany and inform
 you if 7% tax will be added to your fee.
- The fee to register as a candidate Charter Park is **EUR 500**.

N.B. EUROPARC Federation is an NGO based in Germany and does not issue electronic invoice but a PDF invoice.

Expiration of the Registration

As long as the Protected Area is a member of the Federation the Registration will be valid and won't expire.

We encourage all parks who have registered to endeavour to make their first application within one year, but there is no absolute timescale. Nonetheless, we ask the applicant to keep in touch and inform EUROARC of their progress so we can anticipate a full application.

3. SUBMIT A FULL APPLICATION DOSSIER (OR RE-EVALUATION DOSSIER) WITHIN THE SET DEADLINE

Every year, the deadline for the submission of the full application dossier is pre-set for the **15**th **December**. This provides time to check the application, appoint the verifier and begin the evaluation process.

Components of the Application Dossier

The application dossier will have the following documents:

a) **Application / Re-evaluation Report**

- b) An Assessment of the territory and a SWOT analysis;
- c) An **Action Plan** for the next five years. If you wish the charter action plan to be for more than five years please let us know, so we find an agreement with you. Costs will be adjusted proportionally.
- d) A **Sustainable Tourism Strategy** for the five years;
- e) Other set of necessary documents:
 - A **signed commitment** to the Charter Vision, Mission and Principles
 - A map (1/100,000 scale if possible) showing the boundary of the designated Protected Area(s) and the overall Charter area. This is not required in a re-evaluation unless the boundary has changed.
 - •The **overall management plan for the Protected Area** (or equivalent) if available
 - $\bullet \ \mathsf{A} \ \mathsf{small} \ \mathsf{selection} \ \mathsf{of} \ \textit{\textbf{visitor}} \ \mathsf{\textbf{communication/information}} \ \mathsf{\textbf{material}}$
 - Other relevant documents providing **evidence on tourism and management** in the area

How to submit the Application Dossier

The Application / Re-evaluation Report can be submitted **in one of the five ECST official languages** (English, French, German, Spanish or Italian).

The rest of the documents may also be presented in another language, provided that the application report gives good summary responses to each question and clear cross-references to the precise location of details in the strategy and action plan.

EUROPARC will check the dossier and appoint an **external verifier** to conduct a verification of your strategy and action plan on a visit to the park. **The verifier's costs are contained inside the invoice for the application fee we issue.**

The verifier's report is submitted to the evaluation committee who make the recommendation to award, via the EUROPARC Council.

4. PAY THE REQUIRED VERIFICATION FEES

The process of running and coordinating the Charter carries considerable costs, to which participating Protected Areas and EUROPARC contribute. The modest fee paid for participating Protected Areas are summarised as follows:

a) Protected Area Sustainable Destination Candidate

• The cost of making a full application to be awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is **EUR 5.000.**

The fee includes the costs of administration and support for the charter process, the costs of verification and evaluation as well as support of networking events, development of and communications about the charter at a European and global level.

 To assist parks, by reducing the administration of the verifiers visits, EUROPARC adds this cost to the application fee:
 EUR 700. EUROPARC is registered in Germany and we need to check if the applicant organisation is required /or is exempt from VAT (@7%) for the payment of the fee. We will make that check, with the tax authorities in Germany and inform you if 7% tax will be added to your fee.

N.B. EUROPARC Federation is an NGO based in Germany and does not issue electronic invoice but a PDF invoice.

b) Re-evaluation Process of the Sustainable Destination

The Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a process of **continuous development**. Sustainable Tourism, or the need to oversee and manage it does not stand still!

Much of the benefit derived from the engagement take time to emerge and embed in new ways of working. The verification and evaluation visit that arise every five years are an excellent opportunity for the Sustainable Destination to take stock, show improvements, measure change and celebrate success. **Having an external expert give a constructively critical eye on the sustainable tourism work**, as well as offer ongoing support, advice and expertise is one of the most valuable assets of the Charter process. Protected Areas are expected to plan and budget for this ongoing process.

Rules for Re-evaluation

The five year term is counted with the following rule:

- Year # 1 of the Action Plan is equivalent to the awarding year (corresponding to the year when the candidate was first verified);
- Year # 5 of the Action Plan corresponds to the year the ECST member must submit the re-evaluation application by December of that year AT THE LATEST;
- **Year # 6** corresponds to the re-awarding year and Year # 1 (first year) of the new term.

Exceptionally the re-evaluation can be accepted with 1 year delay, but in this case:

- **a)** The Charter Protected Area has to submit a request to extend the submission deadline for one extra year by December year #5 explaining reasons for it;
- **b)** The complete report on the previous action plan (containing all the information about each action, how the indicators have worked, budget, self-evaluation and reasons for any actions scheduled and not implemented and possible actions integrated to the previous action plan) will have to cover also the year#6.
- **c)** The new Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the new term will be of 4 years,not 5.
- **d)** Any delay beyond one year, must be brought to the attention of EUROPARC at the earliest possible moment to discuss a way forward.

In most cases, a resubmission of a new application rather than a re-evaluation on delays of more than 2 years is expected.



Costs of Re-evaluation

- Re-evaluation **does not** entail costs for registration.
- **EUR 5.000** includes Re-evaluation fee for administration of the application, verification, and awarding process.
- **EUR 700** includes costs of travel, accommodation, and board for the visiting verifier, which has been calculated according to the expenses range of the previous years.

Only for Sustainable Destinations dealing with 2nd or 3rd or future re-evaluation:

There is the option to opt for a simplified evaluation system that does not include a verification visit. The verifier will only conduct a DESK re-evaluation on the re-evaluation dossier submitted. This is an optional decision, which is available but it is not recommended by the EUROPARC Federation, that always favours and support the regular re-evaluation with the visit of a verifier, which is mandatory for those at a first re-evaluation.

Costs for DESK re-evaluation:

• **EUR 3000** - includes Re-evaluation fee for administration of the DESK verification, and awarding process.

EUROPARC is registered in Germany and we need to check if the applicant organisation is required /or is exempt from VAT (@7%) for the payment of the fee. We will make that check, with the tax authorities in Germany and inform you if 7% tax will be added to your fee.

Components of the Application Dossier for Re-evaluation

In the year #5 and all subsequent re-evaluations:

- a) Present a **complete report on the previous action plan**, containing all the information about each action, how the indicators have worked, budget, self-evaluation and reasons for any actions scheduled and not implemented and possible actions integrated into the previous action plan;
- b) Present a new Action Plan for the new five-years term;
- c) **Update the Sustainable Tourism Strategy** for the new fiveyears term;
- d) Other set of necessary documents:
 - A **signed commitment** to the Charter Vision, Mission and Principles
 - A completed Re-evaluation Report
 - A map (1/100,000 scale if possible) showing the boundary of the designated Protected Area(s) and the overall Charter area. This is not required in a re-evaluation unless the boundary has changed.
 - •The **overall management plan for the Protected Area** (or equivalent) if available
 - A small selection of visitor communication/information material
 - Other relevant documents providing evidence on tourism and management in the area

5. VERIFICATION/ RE-EVALUATION VISIT TAKES PLACE

Verification and Re-evaluation visits by take place in April-May. A valuable opportunity to utilise the experience and expertise of an external verifier.

6. EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEETS AND ASSESSES

The Charter Evaluation Committee meets in August –September. They have oversight of ALL charter applicants and make the final recommendations to award. The EUROPARC Council receive their recommendations and on behalf of the Federation make the Award.

7. GET YOUR AWARD

Parks receive the decision letter and the verifier report in September-October. The Award is usually presented in a high-profile ceremony at the **European Parliament** in Brussels.



Charter Award Ceremony 2018, European Parliament, Brussels

8. FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE NETWORK

Sustainable Destinations, Partners and Tour Operators should commit to engaging with the European network. It is the largest of its kind. Globally! And in it lies huge potential to gain fresh insights, get new ideas, learn new skills and expand your market.

The main opportunities to network arise in the **EUROPARC Charter Network Meeting**, which takes place every two years. There, all involved come together to look at new developments and seek to share experience, and innovate on best practise.

The **EUROPARC Conference**, which takes place every year, is a further opportunity to meet Protected Areas working in sustainable tourism and the Conference usually holds a workshop devoted to the subject.

As an Awardee of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism, you will make the most of your experience by engaging with the network.



To discover the current list of Sustainable Destinations engaged with the Charter visit: europarc.org/network-sustainable-destinations

EUROPARC hosts online webinars where you can join in and learn from peers across Europe, and indeed the world, from the comfort of your computer screen. You can also find several tools and training opportunities in **EUROPARC** website: europarc.org/tools-and-training.

You can even **join EUROPARC** in **developing projects** that can provide new tools for sustainable tourism. Check out **EUROPARC** news on the website and social media. Follow and exchange with others in the **Charter facebook group** (**facebook.com/groups/europarc.charter.parks**).

Keep up to date with the latest tools, training and best practices at

<u>europarc.org/knowlege-hub/</u> <u>sustainable-tourism/</u>

#EUROPARCSUSTAINABLEDESTINATIONS



9. PLAN FOR RE-EVALUATION

To fully realise the ambitions of the Charter and reap the benefits for the community, businesses and the Protected Area, ongoing improvement, development and innovation is essential. Therefore, entering the process is truly a **journey to a sustainable destination!** Make sure you complete the journey, by planning your re-evaluation.

Please contact the EUROPARC Federation at sustainable.tourism@europarc.org to receive the latest version of the re-evaluation Report and information.



Verification visit in the Galician Atlantic Islands Maritime-Terrestrial National Park (ES)

Find out more at

europarc.org/sustainable-tourism

For more information please contact the EUROPARC Federation at sustainable.tourism@europarc.org

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A SUSTAINABLE JOURNEY



Transboundary Sustainable Destination, Alpi Marittime Nature Park (IT)/ Mercantour National Park (FR) © Francesco Tomasinelli

We believe that Sustainable Tourism is a state of mind, a conscious choice, to work, live and to be on holiday on a different way. Realising how our choices affect the local environment, culture and economy, can positively reshape our behaviour.

To inspire this change, EUROPARC produced the film "A Sustainable Journey".

Watch it in English, German, Italian, French and Spanish at

europarc.org/sustainable-tourism