



# Curriculum of the NATOUR programme

*WP 2 / Output 2.2*

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## Curriculum of the NATOUR programme

### Introduction

The objective of output 2.2 is to develop the curriculum of the NATOUR programme. This consists of defining its **structure** (indicative contents, structured by modules), intended **learning outcomes**, **teaching/learning activities**, as well as the **assessment methods** and **tools**.

This curriculum has been developed based on the Competence profile (WP 1.2) and the results from the study of current available programmes in the field of ecotourism and interpretive nature guiding (WP 2.1). It includes, as well, the agreements reached after the internal discussions carried out among the members of the Working Group 1 of the NATOUR project, and their subsequent contributions.

Contents of the Curriculum:

- Structure of the programme
- Learning outcomes
- Teaching / learning activities and tools
- Assessment methods

### ECTS credits system

The NATOUR post-graduate study programme in ecotourism and interpretive nature guiding will allow for joint delivery, student mobility, transfer of credits, joint recognition of learning outcomes, and award of qualifications among the different participating universities.

The NATOUR programme is structured into 5 modules, 6 ECTS credits each. Hence, it will have a total workload of 30 ECTS credits and will lead to a post-graduate professional diploma at level 7 of European Qualification Framework. For Latin America, this is equivalent to having a total program of 20 academic credits, and fulfilling the requirements for a specialization.

Each ECTS credit is equivalent to approximately 25 hours of student dedication. This means that each module would correspond to 150 hours (but this can slightly differ in each country). Those 150 hours would be, by way of guidance, structured as follows:

- 50 hours of teaching activities
- 10 hours of tutorial activities
- 90 hours of student dedication to study, preparing assessment activities, exams, doing practical activities, etc.

## Structure of the programme

The **core structure** of the programme is made up of **five modules**:

Module 1. Introduction to ecotourism and nature-based tourism

Module 2. Creation and management of ecotourism products and companies

Module 3. The profession of nature guide

Module 4. Interpretation of the natural environment

Module 5. Internship or final project

Each university will have the opportunity to offer an additional module (Module 6), based on its strengths and specialization fields, complementing the core contents of the NATOUR programme. That module could be given as an elective or optional module.

If we move forward with this elective system, there would be **three mandatory modules** of the core structure, that all the students enrolled in the NATOUR post-graduate programme should follow:

- Module 1. Introduction to ecotourism and nature-based tourism
- Module 4. Interpretation of the natural environment
- Module 5. Internship / Final Project

While in the elective **optional modules**, students should select **two** of the following ones:

- Module 2. Creation and management of ecotourism products and companies
- Module 3. The profession of nature guide
- Module 6. (Title to be decided by each university)

## Contents of the core modules of the programme

A description of the contents of each core module of the programme is made in the following lines.

### Module 1. Introduction to ecotourism and nature-based tourism

- Ecotourism: definition, principles, and practical application.
- Ecotourism in the territorial context (1): Principles of the tourism system, types of tourism, value chain.
- Ecotourism in the wider framework of tourism (2): Main trends of domestic and international tourism and ecotourism.
- Ecotourism and the design of experiences: Characteristics, elements, and factors of the tourist experience.
- Sustainable tourism and Ecotourism: fundamentals, objectives, principles, and current trends. The key role of ecotourism as a driver of global sustainable tourism.
- Ecotourism in the framework of nature-based tourism: similarities and differences with other types of nature-based tourism experiences.

- Ecosystem services: the benefits of the natural environment to human beings and the important role of ecotourism.
- Natural resources for ecotourism: geology, fauna, flora and fungi, ecosystems and natural landscapes.
- Cultural resources for ecotourism: Tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- Protected areas: characteristics, categories, and opportunities for ecotourism.
- Positive and negative impacts of tourism in the natural environment. Patterns of environmentally responsible behaviours of tourists / visitors in natural areas.
- Regulation of public use and management of natural areas affected by tourism pressure.

## Module 2. Creation and management of ecotourism products, partnerships and companies

- Management principles for ecotourism companies and products: Planning, organization, direction and control.
- Sustainable management in the company: Application of the pillars of sustainability and the inclusion of sustainability criteria from an early stage of product design.
- Ecotourism stakeholders at different levels. Principles and methods of stakeholder analysis.
- Public-private partnerships, potential partnerships and opportunities for communities and local businesses to invest in, participate in and benefit from ecotourism.
- Management of the value chain activities within the ecotourism frameworks.
- Principles of marketing for ecotourism companies and products.
- Communication techniques, including digital tools and social networks.
- Benchmarking on existing ecotourism products, targeting potential audience and developing new products.
- Identification of the needs and expectations of clients, and evaluation of the satisfaction of ecotourism activities.
- Sustainability practices that can be implemented at company level. Corporate social responsibility.
- Criteria and initiatives for certification of ecotourism and sustainable tourism.
- Best practices: examples of activities, companies, and projects.

## Module 3. The profession of nature guide

- Introduction: definition and characteristics of a professional nature guide.
- Guidance techniques and orientation techniques: elements to consider in guided activities in the natural environment.
- Design of ecotourism activities in a natural area carried out by a professional nature guide.
- Types of guiding activities in the natural environment.
- Target audience: Different tourist segments, needs and expectations. The role of the tourist.
- Materials and equipment.

- Group dynamics.
- Leadership in ecotourism and nature guiding.
- Risk and conflict management techniques for effective group management.
- First aid techniques and basic evacuation techniques. Health and safety procedures.
- Best practices: examples of guides, companies, and projects.

## Module 4. Interpretation of the natural environment

- Introduction: definition of heritage interpretation. Genesis and history of heritage interpretation. Forms of heritage interpretation.
- Contents in interpretation in nature: The concept and perception of nature. Natural landscapes and their origin. Biomes versus anthromes. Interpretation of natural, cultural and economic landscapes.
- Interpretation in the natural environment: Context and main interpretive tools and strategies.
- Principles of planning of interpretation: Administration and management of experience. The tourist script.
- Interpretation techniques: Verbal and non-verbal communication techniques and tools for effective group management.
- Interpretation related to activities in natural areas.
- Content delivery techniques: interpretation and storytelling.
- The importance of the tourist profile in interpretation.
- Best practices: examples of guides, companies, and projects.

## Module 5. Internship or final project

In this module, students will choose to do either an internship or developing a final project.

Professional internships must be carried out in companies, institutions or organizations related to ecotourism or nature-based tourism. The coordination of the postgraduate programme at each university will be in charge of offering the internship at well-established companies or organizations. Internally each university will generate the learning agreements with such institutions as needed. The student's dedication to his/her internship will be of minimum 150 hours, and details regarding the expected process will be agreed between the organization and the programme coordinator at each university.

If the student selects developing a final postgraduate project, it will consist of the elaboration of a report that will put into practice the knowledge acquired in the theoretical modules of the postgraduate course. Therefore, it may consist of a proposal for the creation of an ecotourism product or company or a product of nature guidance / interpretation of natural heritage or similar topics. Such project must be agreed between the student and the teacher responsible for this module.

## Learning outcomes

The post-graduate study programme in ecotourism and interpretive nature-guiding aims to equip students and future professionals with the skills and competences to offer high-quality, economically, environmentally, culturally and socially sustainable ecotourist activities, products and services, while promoting and ensuring responsible use of natural resources and the protection of natural ecosystems. The graduates of this programme will be trained to become true agents driving change towards more environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism.

At the end of this post-graduate course students are expected to be able to:

**Learning outcome 1:** The student should be able to identify the components of ecotourism and sustainable processes associated based on natural, social and cultural resources.

**Learning outcome 2:** The student should recognize the main aspects in the design and management of ecotourism experiences, contributing to implement innovative and sustainable approaches at tourism destinations and companies.

**Learning outcome 3:** The student should be able to design ecotourism guided experiences, providing an interpretation of the local ecosystems, contributing to the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, and benefiting tourism destinations and their local communities.

**Learning outcome 4:** The student should be able to formulate proposals for the implementation of ecotourism and nature guiding projects or the creation of small companies.

## Teaching / learning activities and tools

We will elaborate new learning and teaching tools to provide open educational resources that will form a basis for the programme delivery.

The blended-learning methodology will be used as the framework for joint implementation of the study programme by the different universities involved. For so doing, each university will define more specifically in its own curriculum how this blended learning will be put in place. However, in any case the learning contents developed in the framework of the project and available in the NATOUR project website, jointly with the Virtual Learning Gateway, will have a key role in providing the basic contents of the four content-based modules of the core structure. Those materials will be more widely developed by the teachers in the face-to-face and online synchronous lectures, jointly with the study cases, practical exercises, and field trips.

The blended learning strategy should integrate synchronous and asynchronous elements, organized in a learning management system. A flipped classroom approach will be followed, so that students will use their time in a oriented way, outside the classroom, preparing, through recommended readings, video visualizations, exercise resolution and participation in discussions, the synchronous components, where the interaction between the teacher and the students will be valued, in order to avoid merely expository activities. There will be recourse to the exploration of case studies, the use of database platforms, and the

development of project work. The synchronous component can be directed towards a discussion between pairs, of previously prepared topics, to clarify doubts, and to develop skills. Field trips will be highly valued, allowing identification of natural heritage values and their practical interpretation. Examples of guiding will also be provided.

## Assessment methods

Each university will define the specific assessment methods for each module, keeping in mind that each module will necessarily be assessed by different methods. More specifically, assessment will be able to based on: student participation in discussion forums, the completion of individual and group tasks including oral presentations, the systematics analysis of scientific articles and technical reports, the preparation of short monographs, the elaboration of field work reports, and, with less incidence, the use of written tests or exams.

Internship evaluation will be based through a final report presented by the student, as well as the assessment by the company or organization representative, who worked with the student more closely. Final project evaluation will be based on a document submitted by the student, which will be assessed according to the criteria established by each university.

A weighted average will be used to calculate the final grade.





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