



# 2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title:** Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve Interpretive Center

**Destination, Country:** Torres vedras, Portugal

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**In the category:**  Destination Management     Environment & Climate     Thriving Communities  
 Nature & Scenery     Culture & Tradition     Business & Marketing

**The Story in a picture:**

Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve Interpretive Center



**Summary:**

The former Assenta Tax Guard post was converted into an Interpretation Center for the Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve, with the aim of developing and promoting activities to raise environmental awareness and promote the cultural traditions of the region, associated with the sea. This interpretive center aims to increase local oceanic and coastal literacy, based on an integrated approach and focused on aspects of training, education, awareness and sensitization of tourists and residents. This equipment is a privileged space to deepen knowledge about coastal ecosystems, paleontology and the culture and traditions of coastal communities through educational, training and scientific activities.





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**GOOD PRACTICE STORY**



## Good Practice Story:

### Destination description

*Brief background of the destination.*

Torres Vedras is located on the western coastline of Portuguese territory, more specifically in the western region, north of Lisbon. Good road accessibility also gives the municipality a privileged location in relation to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, simultaneously enhancing its strategic centrality in the context of the capital's area of influence.

Torres Vedras comprises a diversity of landscapes and offers a multitude of activities that invite discovery and enjoyment, in particular the 20 km long coastline and 22 beaches that focus on tourist and environmental quality, attested by several distinctions such as the Blue Flags, Gold Quality Beaches, Accessible Beach and Gold Award Quality Coast. Santa Cruz is the perfect place to relax amid waves of pleasure, the sea, the wind and the sunny weather.

The territory of Torres Vedras retains an identity marked by rurality, which is reflected in the fields where fruits and vegetables grow. It is not possible to describe this landscape without thinking about the vineyards and the Local Protected Landscape of Serras do Socorro and Archeira, which is an area rich in natural, historical, cultural and scenic terms.

The countryside and the beach are joined by the heritage of the city of Torres Vedras, with a historic center endowed with monuments and cultural equipment prepared to receive travelers of all ages.

### Issues faced

*Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.*

The oceans are the largest ecosystem in the world, currently threatened due to the increased exploitation of coastal resources, jeopardizing marine biodiversity. Torres Vedras, given its strategic location in the Atlantic basin, boasts an enormous wealth of marine ecosystems along its 20km coastline, asserting itself as a coastal territory of reference, despite the enormous challenges associated with the exploitation of marine resources and biodiversity, arising from human activities and pressures related to economic and urban activities.

It is precisely in this spectrum that the Municipality of Torres Vedras intended to develop its strategic approach to coastal management. In addition to the management of areas affected by bathing uses, whose quality and distinctions are already widely recognized nationally and internationally, it is a priority to focus on the sustainable management of coastal areas and oceans through an integrated science-based approach that supports policy making to strengthen the management of oceans and coastal areas for the benefit of humanity.

With the aim of safeguarding the relevant natural values in the coastal area of Torres Vedras, the opportunity arose to create a marine protected area called "Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve", along 13km of coastline between the Assenta locality and Blue Beach, covering a total area of about 1090ha composed of a marine component of 994ha and a terrestrial component of 96ha.

The enhancement of this important place in Torres Vedras, combining the protection of marine and coastal values with the recovery of traditions linked to fishing, which once played a very important role in the local economy of the region, was subject to a proactive and integrated management, capable of mobilizing entities and citizens through the harmonious and sustainable management of this territory. In this field, it is considered that Ocean Literacy plays a key role in stimulating training, innovation and cooperation that promote true maritime knowledge and culture, as recognized by the National Strategy for the Sea 2021-2030. Identifying the importance of the strategic management of the Oceans and coastal zones, the Municipality of Torres Vedras intends that the territory of the Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve assumes itself as a true living laboratory for experimentation and promotion of scientific

knowledge, which will simultaneously allow the implementation and operationalization of the Municipal Plan for Ocean Literacy.

### Methods, steps, and tools applied

*Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.*

The existence of relevant natural values in the coastal area of Torres Vedras, combined with the presence of important fishing communities, motivated the Municipality of Torres Vedras, through an application to the European Fund for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, to start a project for the constitution of a protected area in its territory. The main objective of this new protected area is to enhance the natural and cultural heritage associated with the coastal zone and recover the importance of local traditions linked to the sea and fishing.

For this it is essential the installation of an Interpretive Center dedicated to the sea and coastal traditions, located in one of the most emblematic points of the coast, the fishing port of Assenta. With this project, the Municipality intended to implement the municipal strategy for Ocean Literacy, involving the entire educational community, visitors and residents, providing for the promotion of recreational and educational activities, with the aim of protecting the marine environment, valuing and conserving coastal resources and the natural and cultural heritage of the coast.

The Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve Interpretive Center is an innovative facility in the West region, taking on the following priorities:

- Inform about the natural and cultural heritage of the Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve and raise awareness among different types of audiences to the importance of preserving and enhancing the environmental value of coastal and marine values;
- Contribute to the increase of oceanic and coastal literacy related to local biodiversity, coastal and marine ecosystems and natural resources of the ocean;
- Ensuring the dissemination, preservation and safeguarding of the traditions and customs of the region, as well as endogenous products related to the sea;
- Promote the participatory potential of the local and educational community in order to foster their ecological awareness regarding the importance and preservation of coastal areas and the sea;
- Disseminate coastal and marine knowledge, allowing the development of working groups related to the management of coastal and marine space and promoting interaction between the local community and visitors.

The Interpretive Center is the anchor facility for the dissemination of knowledge about the natural and cultural heritage associated with the Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve, targeting the entire population of the municipality of Torres Vedras and its national and international visitors. Activities take on different formats concerning environmental education, scientific research, culture and tourism promotion, such as workshops, training courses, field visits, showcooking and tastings of local cuisine based on seafood. The ultimate aim is to disseminate knowledge of the natural and cultural heritage of the Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve and its importance for the conservation and enhancement of coastal areas and the oceans.

The strategic and specific objectives of the Project made the active involvement of different public and private entities essential in its design, implementation and management. In this context, the project has been supported by the Center for Marine and Environmental Sciences – Faculty of Sciences and Technology of the New University of Lisbon (MARE-NOVA) which in the first instance developed the studies to support the proposed classification of the Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve and will continue to support the project through the study and scientific research related to coastal ecosystems, as well as the promotion of environmental education and knowledge transfer to the general public and to the scientific community at national and international level. In turn, the delegation of competences to the São Pedro da Cadeira Parish Council for the management of the Interpretive Center has as its premise a strategy of proximity and reinforcement of local identity based on the culture and traditions of coastal communities.

The planning of activities to be carried out throughout the year at the Interpretive Center is the responsibility of the Municipality of Torres Vedras, which ensures their development through different educational services and, in addition, by other entities with which cooperation is established, namely the Higher School of Tourism and Sea Technology of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Assenta Naval Club and with the West Aspiring Geopark and Natural History Society in the geoeducation and geotourism about the geological and paleontological heritage.

### Key success factors

*Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.*

A success factor is that the project is focused on the collective interest, since the rehabilitation of the vacant building of the former Assenta Tax Guard Post for the creation of the Interpretation Center of the Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve continues the strategy of the Municipality of Torres Vedras in reclassifying spaces with memory in the municipality, seeking to improve them and return them to the community as a pole of attractiveness and dynamization of educational, scientific and socio-cultural activities. Another key aspect is the collaborative development and management model that makes it possible to use the experience and knowledge of the various local and regional actors involved to ensure the protection, enhancement and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage of the intervention area of the Foz Azul Local Marine Reserve.

### Lessons learned

*Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.*

Partnerships established with different public and private entities provide a dynamic that allows the establishment of a cooperation network that enhances the dissemination of knowledge and the valorization of the main coastal ecosystems present in the protected area, with emphasis on biodiversity, paleontology, geomorphology and the culture and traditions of coastal communities. These partnerships make it possible to use the Interpretive Center as a vehicle to mobilize entities and citizens around the objective of guaranteeing the preservation and valorization this coastal and marine area of Torres Vedras.

On the other hand, the importance given to the community involvement has been fundamental to preserve the local identity, the local customs and traditions. This can be demonstrated simply by choosing personal objects related to local traditions and fishing gear to integrate the exhibition of the Interpretive Center. From another perspective, the support and enhancement of the blue economy, giving as an example the holding of workshops and showcooking activities focused on local delicacies of seafood products has been important to give another perspective on the use of natural resources and in particular to sustainable fishing.

### Achievements and Results

*Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.*

In an initial phase, through the collaboration of the Center for Marine and Environmental Sciences – Faculty of Science and Technology of New University of Lisbon (MARE-NOVA), technical-scientific studies were carried out, which made it possible to improve the knowledge about the area, including the biophysical characterization of the territory, with the analysis of various components related to the population, geomorphology and territorial planning and management, and the survey of the natural and cultural heritage.

During this process, active involvement of the community was sought through participation sessions with local communities, with the aim of collecting relevant information for the delimitation proposal of the protected area and improve the population's perception of the new marine area. There was also the involvement of the main national and regional entities with competences in coastal management and conservation of nature and biodiversity that culminated in a regulation and management proposal, including environmental education and literacy activities.

This was followed by the production of different communication, educational and exhibition materials (rollups, information panels, leaflets, promotional videos, tide pool exploration kit) that aim to inform, raise awareness and educate the public about the importance of coastal ecosystems and the value of the natural and cultural heritage of this territory. In addition, an application for community funds was approved to recover the building of an old tax guard post and convert it into the Interpretive Center of the Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve, configuring this intervention as an operation for the valorization of architectural heritage associated with local fishing arts and traditions. On the other hand, with this equipment, conditions of reception and information are guaranteed for occasional visitors or activities organized and/or guided by local authorities to schools and other groups and events of a different nature. It can be considered that this intervention was decisive for the Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve project, since its opening on April 25, 2022 and the dynamization of activities with the created synergies, around 3500 visitors have already been received. These numbers translate into positive effects that result in the massive dissemination of knowledge and valorization of coastal ecosystems, paleontology and the culture and traditions of the coastal communities of this territory.

### *Tips for other destinations*

*Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions*

The Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve management is based on an integrated and structural approach, focused on the preservation, conservation and enhancement of natural and cultural resources, that can be replicated in different places and scopes. The intervention strategy focuses on three articulated axes that will act in a collective perspective:

- 1) TO KNOW coastal and marine ecosystems, through the promotion of strategic alliances with the scientific community and marine research centres to improve knowledge;
- 2) REHABILITATE coastal ecosystems in a sustainable way in order to guarantee the services and functions that allow the adaptation of species and habitats to climate change and reduce human pressure by minimizing the risks of degradation;
- 3) COMMUNICATE to improve understanding of Ocean Literacy principles. Through various actions, such as awareness campaigns, technical seminars or commemorative events, the aim is to increase the information disseminated to a wider audience.

### *Recognitions and Additional references*

*Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.*

[Video - Foz Azul Local Natural Reserve Interpretive Center](#)

[Video - Foz Azul Local Nature Reserve](#)

[Marine Litter Workshop](#)

[Seaweed workshop](#)

[Marine Figure Construction Workshop](#)

[Geoguide course for the aspiring Geopark Oeste](#)