How Meet Dilijan DMO united stakeholders to create lasting benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

Dilijan, Armenia
Green Rock Foundation - Meet Dilijan
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
People & Community

Summary of Good Practice Story
Dilijan, a forested mountain town just 1.5 hours from Yerevan, Armenia, had strong natural, cultural and educational assets but remained fragmented — local stakeholders worked independently with no shared platform, while winter seasonality left both tourism businesses and community life quiet. Green Rock founded a GSTC-aligned destination marketing organisation for Dilijan, starting with community "Gatherings" to rebuild trust, then organising 120 stakeholders around six pillars (Nature, Culture, Flavors, People, Innovation, Yourself), launching projects like a Winter Market (drawing about 12,000 visitors across December weekends), a first permanent VR heritage experience, youth-led QR heritage trails, and partnerships with local hiking groups, museums, and innovation spaces like TUMO Dilijan and FabLab Dilijan. The DMO's active stakeholder network grew from 30 to over 120 within a month, roughly 25% of visitors now return, visitor growth reached 20%, and the town held its first open public hearings as part of an Urban Design Framework process. The lesson: meaningful destination transformation takes patience — it's built on relationships and trust rather than launching projects alone, and success shows when stakeholders begin collaborating directly with each other, no longer needing the DMO as the constant connector.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

Dilijan is not just a destination you visit-it is a place you meet. Tucked within lush forests and mountain landscapes, Dilijan offers a rare sense of calm where nature, culture, and everyday life exist in quiet harmony. The air is slower, conversations are warmer, and time seems to stretch-inviting you to reconnect not only with the place, but also with yourself.

Here, every experience unfolds through meaningful encounters. You meet nature in its pure, grounding form. You meet culture not as something displayed, but as something lived-through traditions, crafts, and daily life. You meet people whose warmth turns every interaction into something personal. You meet taste and flavors shaped by local ingredients, heritage, and creativity. And alongside it all, you meet innovation-quietly emerging through new ideas, creative spaces, and a shared vision for the future.

What makes Dilijan truly special is this balance: between tradition and modernity, between preservation and progress, between being deeply local and confidently open to the world. It is more than a destination-it is a place where you slow down, connect, and experience a way of life shaped by nature, community, and intention.

At the heart of Dilijan is a close-knit community shaping the destination's future.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

For many years, Dilijan faced a paradox. Located just 1.5 hours from Yerevan and surrounded by exceptional natural and cultural assets, it remained relatively hidden from both domestic and international visitors. The change was needed because Dilijan faced a combination of structural and seasonal challenges that limited both its tourism potential and community vitality. Despite strong natural, cultural, and educational assets, the destination remained fragmented, with stakeholders working independently and no shared platform to connect people, initiatives, and resources. This reduced collaboration, limited visibility of local efforts, and made it difficult to build a unified destination vision.

Seasonality further intensified these challenges. During winter months, both visitor numbers and community activity significantly declined, creating a quiet low season that affected not only tourism businesses but also the overall vibrancy of the town. Many local businesses experienced reduced income and low occupancy, which limited their ability to sustain year-round operations and invest in growth.

In addition, Dilijan lacked continuous programming and structured storytelling to maintain engagement beyond peak seasons. Cultural, educational, and community initiatives existed but were not sufficiently connected or promoted as part of a cohesive destination experience. These highlighted that Dilijan did not lack potential—it lacked connection, coordination, and continuity.

The Vision: What you set out to do

The response to this challenge was the creation of a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Dilijan, founded by Green Rock with the belief that destination development must place the community at its center. The vision was to position Dilijan as a leading year-round destination in

Armenia, where nature, culture, innovation, and local life come together in a sustainable and balanced way.
This approach was guided by GSTC standards, ensuring that tourism development supports environmental protection, cultural preservation, and community wellbeing, rather than growth alone. From the outset, the goal was not only to attract visitors, but to improve quality of life for residents and strengthen local ownership of the destination.
The first step was initiating community engagement through the “Gatherings”, which brought together residents, businesses, and stakeholders to build trust, encourage dialogue, and reconnect the community around a shared vision.
This enabled coordination, strengthened collaboration, and transformed isolated efforts into collective impact.
Ultimately, the vision was to transform Dilijan into a connected, sustainable, and community-driven destination where tourism growth directly benefits people and place.

The Journey: How change happened
The transformation began with a simple principle: Dilijan's future as a destination depends on the people who live, work, and create value in the community.
Rather than promoting individual attractions, the DMO brought together 120 stakeholders around six pillars that reflect the essence of Dilijan: Nature, Culture, Flavors, People, Innovation, and Yourself. One of the first steps was understanding the destination as a whole. The DMO became the first to collect and structure comprehensive information about Dilijan's tourism ecosystem (243.800 visitors), creating a foundation for collaboration and connecting businesses and stakeholders. The DMO’s role was not only to promote Dilijan, but to create connections between people who had the same goal but previously worked separately. This helped transform individual efforts into a more coordinated destination movement.
For the Nature pillar, partnerships were established with Trails of Change, local hiking communities, and Dilijan National Park NGO to develop and promote nature-based experiences. Under the Culture pillar, collaboration with museums and cultural institutions led to new ways of presenting local heritage. The DMO also mentored the QR Dilijan project - supported teenagers with opening https://nextgendili.am/ 7 QR stands placed next to monuments. The project continues its activities by adding 7 more QRs in the city. With support of Green Rock Foundation was developed Colors of Dilijan and with the help of 50 participants translated the destination's landscapes, nature, and character into a distinctive visual palette - in future transferred to scarfs and postcards- and Dilijan Code, a creative journey that resulted in a unique destination scent inspired by the destination's forests, culture, and sense of place, later transformed into a tangible product representing Dilijan's identity. Also Winter Market which was a seasonal community initiative that brought together local businesses and producers by creating a shared space to showcase Dilijan’s products and experiences. Through this initiative, the DMO expanded its active network from 30 to more than 120 engaged stakeholders within one month, strengthening collaboration and community participation. Innovation was introduced through projects that connected heritage with technology, including the installation of Dilijan's

first permanent VR experience at the Dilijan Local Lore Museum and Art Gallery. Innovation was strengthened through collaboration with educational and creative spaces such as TUMO Dilijan, which provides free digital and creative education for young people, and FabLab Dilijan, a space for prototyping and hands-on innovation. FabLab students contributed to destination projects, including a 3D-printed installation for a future coworking space supported by the Green Rock, while the Foundation also supported collaboration with TUMO through ongoing initiatives such as book donations.

As Dilijan's story developed, the destination also became more visible beyond Armenia through participation in international tourism and development forums in Georgia, Moscow, and other platforms, allowing the community's experience to be shared internationally. Visitor insights also showed stronger destination loyalty, with approximately 25% of visitors returning to Dilijan, reflecting a deeper emotional connection with the destination and 20% tourism growth.

Community engagement remained at the center of the process. Regular meetings, working groups, surveys, public presentations, and open discussions ensured that residents could contribute ideas and shape decisions. The greatest challenge was not creating new experiences but building trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Over time, these conversations created a stronger sense of ownership and a shared vision for Dilijan's future.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The results became visible both in numbers and in the way, people began to engage with Dilijan. One of the strongest examples was the Winter Market, organized on all weekends of December. The initiative attracted approximately 12.000 visitors, creating a significant low-season tourism flow while providing local producers, artisans, and businesses with a free platform to showcase their products. It demonstrated that Dilijan could attract visitors year-round, not only during peak seasons. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwDMe-FRjD4)

Collaboration also led to innovative approaches to understanding visitor needs. At the same time, hiking and nature-based activities continued to grow, strengthening Dilijan's position as a leading hiking destination and encouraging more sustainable visitor flows.

The most important change was within the community itself. For the first time, open public hearings were organized as part of the Dilijan Urban Design Framework process together with the municipality, giving residents a direct opportunity to contribute to decisions about the town's future.

Initiatives such as Summer in Dilijan and the weekly Dilijan Event Calendar helped connect local businesses, organizations, and event organizers, creating greater visibility and collaboration. Green Rock Foundation also supported long-term community development through initiatives such as Apicius Armenia Hospitality School and Café Cemi, creating new opportunities for education, skills development, and employment. Today, stakeholders are more connected, local voices are more actively heard, and residents increasingly see themselves as active contributors to Dilijan's development.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

One of the most important lessons from this journey is that meaningful transformation takes time. Building a stronger destination is not only about launching projects or attracting visitors-it is about building relationships, trust, and a shared sense of purpose within the community. Progress rarely happens overnight, and some of the most valuable results only become visible after years of consistent effort.

What surprised us most was how much people were willing to contribute once they felt their voices were genuinely being heard. Open discussions, public presentations, working groups, and community meetings showed that residents, businesses, and organizations wanted to be involved in shaping Dilijan's future. The challenge was not a lack of ideas, but creating the conditions for dialogue and collaboration.

Another key lesson was the importance of listening and adapting. Not every initiative works exactly as planned, and feedback often led us to rethink, improve, or adjust our approach. Being open to different perspectives helped create stronger and more relevant outcomes.

Our advice to other destinations is simple: be patient, listen carefully, and work step by step. Sustainable destination development is a long-term process. Not everything can be achieved at once, but with consistency, collaboration, and trust, even small actions
can lead to significant change over time.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

The impact of this work continues to grow beyond individual projects. Initiatives such as Summer in Dilijan and Winter in Dilijan have become recurring platforms that bring together local businesses, organizations, producers, and residents. Most encouragingly, collaboration increasingly happens without the DMO acting as the main connector-stakeholders now know each other, work together directly, and create new opportunities on their own.

The culture of cooperation has also inspired new initiatives. Projects such as Apicius Armenia Hospitality School are helping strengthen local capacity and create career opportunities. Through Café Cemi, also founded by Green Rock, students gain practical experience and employment opportunities. Together with Apicius Armenia, it enables young people to learn, work, and build their future in Dilijan.

Another lasting outcome has been a stronger sense of pride and ownership within the community. The weekly Dilijan Event Calendar continues to connect community initiatives, businesses, and visitors.

Perhaps the most important ripple effect is that Dilijan is no longer developing through isolated efforts. The destination's future will be shaped by a community that has learned how to work together.

Awards or Certifications

MICE Excellence Award 2025
MICE Excellence Award 2026
GSTC Membership

Destination International Membership

Web Articles

1. https://www.worldtravelawards.com/profile-43829-meet-dilijan
2. https://alphanews.am/en/dilijan-wins-mice-excellence-award-for-best-foreign-event-destination/
3. https://mice-awards.com/winners#!/tab/2288252381-2

Other Relevant Links

1. https://www.gstc.org/meet-dilijan-joins-gstc/
2. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/destinations-international-is-delighted-to-ugcPost-7442971193420349441-gTqH/
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puN6J8A9TKM
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVU2K7QaGZk
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuNV3GQlpZA

Quotes or Testimonials

Dear friends,
Thank you to everyone who joined us yesterday at Deghceni Clubhouse.
Your presence, kindness, and warmth made the evening truly special.
We are deeply grateful to GreenRock Dilijan and Meet Dilijan for their inspiring partnership.
This is only the beginning - together we will make Dilijan a bright point on the world map,
a place of light, friendship, and creativity.

- Deghceni Guesthouse Owner