

## SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY FOR THE CURONIAN SPIT (LITHUANIA / RUSSIAN FEDERATION)



# SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY FOR THE CURONIAN SPIT (LITHUANIA / RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Commissioned on the basis of the Subsidy Contract No. STHB.02.01.00-SE-0091/16 for the ERDF co-financing of DUNC - Development of UNESCO Natural and Cultural assets, a project of the Interreg South Baltic Programme

This study is prepared within the implementation process of DUNC - Development of UNESCO Natural and Cultural assets, a transboundary cooperation project of the Interreg South Baltic Programme

Part-financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund)



European  
Regional  
Development  
Fund

**DISCLAIMER:** The contents of this “Sustainable Heritage Tourism Strategy for the Curonian Spit (Lithuania / Russian Federation)” are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union, the Managing Authority or the Joint Secretariat of the South Baltic Transboundary Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

Written by: Ramunas Povilanskas (Co-ordinator), Edmundas Greimas, Evaldas Urbonas & Arvydas Urbis. EUCC Baltic Office, Klaipeda, 2020.

© DUNC, 2020

Cover image: Visitors in the sandstorm in Nagliai Strict Nature Reserve (by Ramunas Povilanskas)

Illustrations: Yvonne Battiau, Lina Dikšaitė, Aušra Feser, Luc Gellen, Vytautas Knyva, Ramunas Povilanskas, Arvydas Urbis, Wikimedia Commons

Design: Kadrius UAB

## FOREWORD

As of 2020, there are 1121 World Heritage sites listed by UNESCO in 167 countries worldwide. Of all this abundance and diversity of the sites, we have elicited and focused on the coastal cultural World Heritage ones. A UNESCO-listed property is considered as coastal if it was established or flourished thanks to the sea, maritime trade or coastal processes, even though today it might be further away from the sea (f.e., Ostia Antica, Bruges or Vanha Rauma). Currently, there are 258 coastal and hinterland cultural World Heritage sites: 127 - in Europe, 52 - in Asia, 47 - in the Americas, and 32 - in the rest of the World.

A vast Eurasian continuum of maritime civilizations, crafts, industries, trade, commerce, warfare and other sea-related activities - from Europe to the Far East - has engendered the largest number of coastal cultural UNESCO World Heritage sites. It comes as no surprise that almost half of all coastal cultural World Heritage sites are in Europe bearing in mind a long cultural tradition of coastal and maritime economy and a very indented coastline of Europe. Most of these coastal cultural World Heritage sites throughout Europe are, at least partially, restored, well preserved and become appealing assets for tourism development of various kind - from cultural tourism to cruise ship calls.

Five of the 258 coastal cultural World Heritage sites in the World are either transboundary ones or listed in more than one country, including the Curonian Spit, a transboundary coastal cultural landscape in the South Baltic Area shared by Lithuania and the Russian Federation. Altogether, there are 17 coastal and hinterland cultural UNESCO World Heritage sites in the South Baltic Area: one heritage city of European naval history, two prehistoric cultural World Heritage sites at the seaside, three cultural landscapes at the seaside, three properties of modern coastal architecture and industry, and eight properties of the classical European coastal cultural heritage.

The South Baltic Area is a region where coastal cultural World Heritage sites, without exaggeration, are unique on the World scale. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Modernity, it was the playground of several Northern European superpowers (including the Hanseatic League). Nowadays, there is a clear added value in coastal cultural World Heritage sites in the South Baltic Area since these are valuable assets for sustainable tourism development. A South Baltic seaside-heritage-experiential tourism cluster emerges comprising World Heritage sites, seaside resorts, coastal cities and creative sector outlets sharing a common vision, the key brand elements, unique selling points, and iconic images.

Promotion of sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in the South Baltic Area is among the key priorities of the Interreg South Baltic Programme 2014-2020. The Programme aims at unfolding South Baltic's potential for blue and green growth through cross-border cooperation between local and regional actors from Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. Regarding tourism, the Programme aims to increase the development of the South Baltic area's natural and cultural heritage assets into sustainable tourist destinations. In this effort, the Interreg South Baltic Programme focuses on blue and green tourism services, products and tools that help to increase the number of visits in cultural and natural heritage sites.

DUNC (Development of UNESCO Natural and Cultural assets) is a three-year project of the Interreg South Baltic Programme 2014-2020 jointly implemented by seven partners in three South Baltic coastal regions of Sweden, Germany and Lithuania and focusing on four coastal cultural World Heritage sites: the Naval Town of Karlskrona (Sweden), the Historic Centres of Stralsund and Wismar (Germany), as well as two cultural landscapes - the Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland (Sweden) and the Curonian Spit (Lithuania/Russia). The strategies and action plans for the South Baltic coastal cultural World Heritage sites comprise one of the main deliverables of the DUNC project aimed to facilitate the South Baltic collaboration in building synergies between World Heritage conservation and tourism interests.

Dr Ramunas Povilanskas, Professor, Klaipeda University  
Vice-President, EUCC - Coastal and Marine Union

# CONTENTS

|                                                                                     |                                                               |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----|
|    | INTRODUCTION                                                  | 4  |
|    | 1. CURONIAN SPIT AS A TRANSBOUNDARY WORLD HERITAGE LANDSCAPE  | 5  |
|    | 2. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE REGION                        | 10 |
|    | 3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY | 13 |
|   | 4. WORLD HERITAGE TOURISM SUPPLY SIDE                         | 17 |
|  | 5. WORLD HERITAGE TOURISM DEMAND SIDE                         | 25 |
|  | SUMMING-UP                                                    | 34 |

# INTRODUCTION

DUNC (Development of UNESCO Natural and Cultural assets) is a three-year project of the 2014-2020 Interreg South Baltic Programme, part-financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund). It is a transboundary cooperation effort of seven partners located in Germany, Lithuania and Sweden. Five of the project partners – Municipality of Karlskrona (Lead Partner, Sweden), Municipality of Mörbylånga (Sweden), Curonian Spit National Park Administration (Lithuania), Hanseatic City of Stralsund (Germany), and Hanseatic City of Wismar (Germany) – represent four South Baltic coastal cultural UNESCO World Heritage sites: the Naval Port of Karlskrona, the Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland (both in Sweden), the Curonian Spit (Lithuania/Russia), the Historic Centres of Stralsund and Wismar (Germany). The other two project partners, EUCC Germany and EUCC Baltic Office (Lithuania), represent EUCC – Coastal and Marine Union, which is the Europe's largest coastal and marine conservation network.

The overall objective of the DUNC project is to achieve that these coastal cultural UNESCO World Heritage sites in the South Baltic Area jointly develop a concept which makes use of the World Heritage sites and their Outstanding Universal Values as catalysts for developing sustainable tourist destinations. To achieve the main objective of the DUNC project, altogether over 30 activities were planned throughout the three-year project implementation period. All the activities within the DUNC project are divided among six work-packages: WP1 was dedicated to Management and Coordination, WP2 – Communication and Dissemination, WP3 – Joint Quality Management, WP4 dealt with identification of synergies and collaboration on development and provision of products/services, WP5 – Stakeholder involvement, and WP6 – Long-Term Governance.

The main objective of WP3 was to jointly form strategies and action plans for sustainable heritage tourism through exchanging good practice, learning from other South Baltic coastal cultural UNESCO World Heritage sites and transboundary sharing of best expertise. It is directly linked to the Main Output 1 of the DUNC project: Strategies for sustainable tourism and accompanying action plans jointly produced and integrated in or added to management plans. To achieve the main objective of WP3, as well as the main project objective, two project deliverables (intermediate steps of the project that can be both tangible and intangible) were delivered in Wp3:

- **Deliverable 3.1.** Producing a baseline for the partners in the project.
- **Deliverable 3.2.** A transboundary framework for sustainable tourism strategy implementation in the South Baltic Area.

It is clear from what is said above, that delivering the Deliverable 3.2 (A transboundary framework for su-sustainable tourism strategy implementation in the South Baltic Area) was the pivotal project activity in the final phase of the DUNC project implementation providing a solid basis for continuity of project achievements.

# 1. CURONIAN SPIT AS A TRANSBOUNDARY WORLD HERITAGE LANDSCAPE

The Baltic Sea Comprehensive Spatial Planning Programme Visions and Strategies around Baltic 2030 emphasized among priorities for the sustainable development and integrated spatial planning in the Baltic Sea Region the necessity to develop transnational green networks including landscapes, inter alia, those ones of the Curonian Spit. Baltic Agenda 21 network has recognized the international value of the Curonian Spit by including it into the Baltic List of the “green spots”, i.e., specific areas of international environmental importance possessing important natural values. The whole Curonian Spit together with the offshore zone is also included into the List of Baltic Sea marine and protected areas, and is designated as Baltic Important Bird Area.

The varied and a very dynamic landscape with high biological diversity is a distinctive feature of the Curonian Spit on a regional scale. The 33-km long ridge of 40-60 m high mobile Curonian dunes is the longest coastal ridge of mobile dunes in Europe.

Until now, dune landscapes of the Curonian Spit are among the most dynamic in the Baltic Sea area. There are four strips of the migrating barchans still remaining on the spit. The Great Curonian Mobile Dune Ridge is protected as a transboundary strict nature reserve within the Kurshskaya kosa national park on the Russian side of the spit (est. 1987) and Kuršių nerija national park on the Lithuanian side (est. 1991). The Curonian Spit is valuable internationally as a single transboundary cultural landscape of shifting and forested dunes of outstanding international importance, which is under constant threat from natural forces.



Transboundary mobile dune strip of the Curonian Spit

Politically, the Curonian Spit is divided between two political entities: the northern half of the spit belongs to Lithuania, whereas the southern half belongs to Kaliningrad Oblast, which is a tiny southeast Baltic exclave of Russian Federation, sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania. However, this is a relatively new situation.

Apart from the inter-war period of 1920-1939 and the period since Lithuanian political independence in 1990, the entire Curonian Spit has for many centuries been integrated into the same political systems. The Curonian Spit and Curonian Lagoon for almost five centuries (1422-1918) belonged to Prussia

and, later, Germany. However, within a single political entity, the spit was divided between two districts. The administrative border between Memel and Fischhausen counties was drawn across the Curonian Lagoon from the Skirvyte (Rus. Severnaya) river mouth to the white mobile dune on Cape Grobštas (Rus. Vostochny) on the spit, which was clearly and distinctively visible over the lagoon on the background of the hitherto stable forested ancient parabolic dunes.

The historical border from the Skirvyte river mouth to the white mobile dune on the cape Grobštas on the Curonian Spit dividing the Curonian Lagoon and the Curonian Spit into two administrative and, later - political entities remained intact with minor changes for the last six centuries till nowadays.



*The Lithuanian-Russian border with Cape Grobštas (Vostochny) in the background*

In 1928 the first nature reserve was established on the German side of the spit, which was designated to protect the mobile dune strip stretching from the German-Lithuanian border to Pillkopen (Lit. Pilkopa, Rus. Morskoye) village. Meanwhile, the policy of dune forestation was continued

on the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit by the Lithuanian government. Establishing of the political border on the Curonian Spit in 1920 also had a significant impact on tourism development on the spit as a transboundary area during the entire interwar period.

Differences in nature conservation, landscape management and tourism development between the northern and southern parts of the Curonian Spit have started to appear in 1930s when the spit was divided politically between the German province of East Prussia and the autonomous Klaipeda region within the Republic of Lithuania.

Rossitten and Sarkau (Lit. Šarkuva, Rus. Lesnoy) had rapidly developed into major seaside resorts catering mainly for German seaside and nature tourists from Königsberg and other towns of northern East Prussia. Thus, in 1935 Sarkau hosted 1438 tourists and over 13 thousand excursionists; Rossitten hosted over 3 thousand tourists and nearly 20 thousand excursionists; However, Pilkoppen (Lit. Pilkopa, Rus. Morskoye) hosted only 800 tourists and 325 excursionists in the same year. Most of them were youth travellers - schoolchildren and students from Königsberg visiting the mobile dunes of the Curonian Spit for education purposes.

Meanwhile, on the northern side of the Curonian Spit, visitors from Lithuania started to prevail during the 1930s. In 1935 Nida had hosted over 3 thousand excursionists and 4500 tourists, whereas Preila had received only 176 tourists and Pervalka as little as 50 ones. Juodkrante became the most important seaside resort on the Lithuanian part of the

Curonian Spit receiving 4000 thousand tourists and 3000 thousand excursionists in 1935. Most of them had come from Klaipeda and Kaunas. Particular important and popular recreational event, which attracted thousands of tourists to Smiltynė was the Maritime Festival of Klaipeda (celebrated since 1934).

If properly managed, the Curonian Spit could be transformed into a flourishing transboundary heritage and ecotourism centre of a regional scale, since in addition to its conservation value, it is also an important tourist destination. However, lack of a coordinated transboundary management is a problem for sustainable tourism development.

Currently, the whole spit is administrated by three municipalities: Zelenogradsk (RU), Neringa (LT) and Klaipeda (LT). A common Soviet legacy provides an important co-operation framework for both national parks established nearly simultaneously across the border. There is a common interest to promote the transboundary integration of dune, forest, and shoreline management combined with the environmentally friendly tourism development on the Curonian Spit. From the perspective of the southeast Baltic regional development, and from a broader European perspective, Curonian Spit is seen as a single area.



*Nida, administrative centre of Neringa municipality*

However, as there is no common transboundary spatial planning and management framework for the whole spit, this problem is particularly acute for the forest, dune and coastal zone management, since these essential components of local nature do not recognize borders in their evolution. There are no coherent guidance and information services, no common transboundary network of trekking trails or cycling paths, etc. This impediment increases with time, since ever more tourists come to the spit for educational rather than passive leisure purposes.

Although the spit is a site with internationally recognized natural heritage values, so far it lacked a common management framework in both countries. Since the spit is a transboundary area, the task of heritage conservation and management is primarily a transboundary issue there.

The transboundary integrated sustainable heritage tourism development strategy with a user-tailored action plan will provide such a common framework for heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development in both national parks on the Curonian Spit. Also, efforts to protect and cherish the Curonian heritage of local artisanal fishermen on both sides of the border are essential for the transboundary coherence of conservation and sustainable management of the Curonian Spit as a transboundary coastal UNESCO World Heritage site. The main weaknesses hampering the development of transboundary sustainable heritage tourism of the regional scale on the Curonian Spit include:

- 1) Absence of a common information and tourism system on both sides of the border.
- 2) Too few border check points for the efficient development of the transboundary cooperation and too many restrictions to cross the border (e.g., tourists are not allowed to cross the border by foot or by boat to mention just one obstacle).
- 3) Curonian Spit doesn't have an image of integral tourist destination on the international tourism market. 90 % of foreign

tourists arriving to Nida from Klaipeda still consider it a 'dead-end' in spite of visa-free travel opportunities to visit the Russian side of the spit.

There exists an urgent need to facilitate integration of Russian and EU nature conservation policy in dune areas. Such efforts would help establishing coherence between the Russian system of protected areas and the sites forming the European Natura 2000 series on the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit.

Although being reunited within a single political entity, the Curonian Spit was, nevertheless, divided administratively between Lithuania and the Russian Federation following the pre-war political borders. Such administrative division marked a notable devolution in management patterns between the northern (Lithuanian) and southern (Russian) parts of the Curonian Spit, following a substantial autonomy on spatial planning and local tourism development issues, which Lithuanian government enjoyed within the centralized system of the Soviet Union. At the same time, Lithuanian authorities, representing and managing a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, largely benefited from the generous financial aid of the Soviet government in Moscow, which was interested to turn the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit into one of the most prestigious Soviet seaside resorts.

As a result of the reduction of nuclear missiles and military bases in the Kaliningrad Oblast of Russian Federation in 1985-1989, the primary military function of the Russian part of the Curonian Spit lost its relevance. Then, a very radical decision was taken by the new-minded Moscow authorities in 1987, and the Russian part of the Curonian Spit was designated as Kurshskaya kosa national park on the administrative basis of the Kurshskaya kosa forest enterprise (leskhoz). Remarkably, this happened four years ahead of the establishing of the national park on the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit, regardless much better administrative capacities as well as much longer spatial planning traditions necessary for awarding the national park status there.

The national park status allowed the Russian side of the Curonian Spit to catch-up with the Lithuanian side regarding integrated landscape management and nature conservation. Russian authorities promptly adapted the key principles, which were fostered for several decades in the spatial planning tradition on the Lithuanian seaside.

Therefore, the Curonian Spit along with its dune landscapes and former Curonian fishing villages has very specific situation in the management pattern compared to other 4 national parks of Lithuania. Also, on the Russian side, the management differences are very prominent, when comparing functional zoning and management patterns between Kurshskaya kosa and other Russian national parks. Such sophisticated functional zoning system is continued till nowadays on both sides of the Curonian Spit. Landscape management on the Curonian Spit, which is based on the functional zoning and eco-zoning, is currently regulated by the legally-binding master plans.

The very first versions of the plans were developed for the Kurshskaya kosa national park in 1987, and for the Kursiu nerija national park in 1994. These plans provided a rather satisfactory regulatory framework for the management of both national parks. In the strict nature reserves any kind of activity, except from nature preservation, conservation and restoration, was prohibited. However, it was suggested, due spatial management peculiarities (the main Klaipeda-Kaliningrad road crossing all strict nature reserves), to elicit sub-zones of prohibited and limited management activities.

Since the late Soviet period, landscape management on the entire Curonian Spit was designated in four functional zones: strict nature reserves (Rus. zapovednik, Lit. rezervatas), protected zones - managed nature reserves (Rus. zakaznik, Lit. draustinis), where strictly regulated visits are allowed; recreational areas and settlements.

The prohibited areas were established east of the road to the very shoreline of the Curonian Lagoon. Meanwhile, limited intervention zones cover the entire territory west of the road (including the road itself and a 10 m wide roadside) to the coastline of the Baltic Sea. In the zone of limited intervention, only road and foredune amendment actions, limited fire prevention and sanitary forest protection measures are allowed. Due to the Lithuanian-Russian state border regime, the whole territory of the central highest mobile dune area is protected as a strict nature reserve.

The strict protection of the central mobile dunes (the Gliders' dunes) extends to both sides of the Lithuanian-Russian border, except of the Klaipeda-Kaliningrad road, the Nida/Morskoye checkpoint and the foredune. Such transboundary functional integration of landscape, dune and forest management approaches on the Curonian Spit culminated in December 2000, when the entire spit was included into the UNESCO World Heritage list as a transboundary cultural landscape, representing an outstanding example of a landscape that is under constant threat from natural forces.



*A commemorative sign for the UNESCO-listing of the Curonian Spit*

## 2. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE REGION

The Curonian barrier spit (Lit. Kuršių nerija, Rus. Kurshskaya kosa, Germ. Kurische Nehrung) separates the Curonian Lagoon from the open Baltic sea. The non-tidal Curonian Lagoon is a shallow semi-locked and nearly fresh-water body, located on the southeast rim of the Baltic Sea. It is the largest Baltic Sea lagoon (surface area 1,586 km<sup>2</sup>). The Nemunas river (catchment basin - 98,200 km<sup>2</sup>) discharges into the lagoon on its way to the Baltic proper. The length of the Curonian Spit is 94 km (sensu stricto), the width varies from 380 m to 4 km. It is the largest accumulative barrier sand spit in the Baltic Sea region.

The total length of mobile dune strips on the Curonian Spit is 32.6 km, 21.9 km being on the Russian side and 10.7 km on the Lithuanian side. They form the most distinctive feature of the spit, with the highest dunes reaching 60 meters in height.



*The Great Curonian Dune Ridge on the Russian side of the spit*

Curonian Spit belongs to the southeast Baltic region of graded coasts, which took their present shape during Pleistocene and Holocene. Within the strip of coasts, which stretches northwards from the Sambian peninsula, deposits of glacial drift and marine sand accretion prevail. Recent geological history of the Curonian Spit since the end of the latest Ice Age (ca. 10-12 thousand years

B.P.) is closely related to the development of the Baltic Sea. These processes were the most active during and after the Littorina sea transgression (5-6 m above the modern sea level) in the mid-Holocene (8-5 thousand years B.P.).

Coastal dune and lagoon formation were the key processes featuring the latest development of the southeast Baltic coastal region, including that of the Curonian Spit. Many other barrier spits worldwide had also originated during the same period as a result of the global sea water level rise.

The modern landscape features of the Curonian Spit on both sides of the border have resulted from the intensive drift of sand dunes in the 17th-18th centuries, and their further stabilization in the 19th century. In that time, the ancient parabolic dunes, which prevailed since Holocene, were completely destroyed by the shifting sand and were replaced by the barchans. Excess sand supplied from the seashore had formed the chain of shifting barchans, which rapidly advanced eastwards across the spit under the prevailing westerly winds. The barchans had extinguished forests and forested parabolic dunes on the spit. The villages had to be moved to safer places under the threat of mobile dunes.

Eleven different abandoned village sites are identified on the Curonian Spit from the period of 1400s-1800s, although actually there were just four to five contemporary villages, which had moved from place to place as mobile dunes advanced. In the map from 1733 and particularly in the Schroetter's map of Prussia from 1796-1800 we see that a better part of the spit had become woodless and covered by migrating barchans by then. Although, the main reasons of this change are considered to be felling of the original mixed forests, overgrazing of the open sand plains and forest fires, natural agents related to tectonics and climate change shouldn't be ignored either.

The process of deforestation and spreading of the shifting sand on the Curonian Spit was not a unique one-time process during the modernity. Rather it was a cyclical phenomenon. The number of inhabitants and population density had fluctuated significantly from the 1500s to 1800s due to frequent warfare of Prussia against Sweden and Russia

and, later, due to the disastrous plague of 1709-1711. This fluctuation had led to a shifting landscape succession on the Curonian Spit with deforestation and natural reforestation taking place in turn.

Notably, in the times of economic chaos and depopulation, the number of grazing cattle and sheep and the scale of the forest felling had significantly declined on the spit. Meanwhile, the periods of prosperity and population growth had usually led to deforestation and, as a negative side effect, to sand mobilization. Also, climate fluctuations should not be ignored either. Archaeologists have witnessed intensive accumulations of marine sand at other strips of the southeast Baltic Sea coast from the 1500s to 1800s as well.

Therefore, as a mischievous result of all these unfortunate natural coincidences combined with the irresponsible human actions, the chain of the shifting barchans had emerged, evolved and rapidly advanced across the spit under the prevailing strong westerly winds. It is not completely clear, why the parabolic dunes had been replaced by the barchans on the Curonian Spit, since in other Baltic coastal areas parabolic dunes were still very active as sand drift agents during the same period.

Ludwig Gedeminus Rhesa, an early 19th century Lithuanian scholar and author, depicted the mobile dunes of the Curonian Spit as a destructive evil force, which threatened the humane order of the universe:

“Regard here, oh traveller, the hand of destruction! Few years ago, orchards were blossoming in this place and honest villagers were dwelling peacefully in the village stretching from the forest to the seashore. Now, what you see? Only pure sand of wasteland...” (“Prutena, or the sunken village”).

The beginning of dune stabilization on the Curonian Spit is considered to be the year 1803 when the first plantation was established in Krantas (Germ. Cranz, Rus. Zelenogradsk). In 1811 these plantations were extended to Šarkuva (Germ. Sarkau, Rus. Lesnoy). However, there was no efficient way of stabilizing shifting barchans when westerly winds from the Baltic Sea could bring the sand without any obstacles to slow it down. Consequently, the most important phase of dune stabilization was to create a foredune along the seashore. This effort required special sophistication and a lot of patience because of the length of the shore.

The next step was to plant trees. Roots of seedlings were usually treated by soaking in a fertile semi-liquid medium. The tree, which was planted most on the sand dunes, was the mugo pine (*Pinus mugo* Turra, Rehder 1947). Because of their tolerance to different environments, they have been introduced into various northern regions in the temperate zone, and also to the mountain valleys of Crimea. This species can develop extensive and dense roots (helpful to gather scarce moisture) and long scrubby lower limbs (shading the ground).

On the Curonian Spit, mugo pine was planted in an area of ca. 2250 hectares of forest. The oldest forested dunes are in the southern parts of the Curonian Spit (now within the territory of the Kaliningrad Oblast). The dunes at Nida were forested with mugo pine in

1865-1875, whereas the dunes at Rasytė (Germ. Rossitten, Rus. Rybachy) and Pilkopa (Germ. Pillkoppen, Rus. Morskoye) were stabilized in 1880-1890. The dunes in the northern sections of the Curonian Spit, near Smiltynė (Germ. Sandkrug), Juodkrantė (Germ. Schwarzort), Pervalka (Germ. Perwelk) and Preila (Germ. Preil) were stabilized at the turn of the 19th to 20th century.

Forest planting was the main dune management strategy on the Curonian Spit till the very 21st century. These forests in most places were, and to a very large extent, still are carefully managed, and replanted in the case of damage, e.g., from accidental fire.

As a result of the arduous forestation efforts by several generations of locals generously funded by the Government of the Kingdom of Prussia, much of the necessary primary work on dune stabilization of the Curonian Spit was completed by 1904. These efforts stopped the rapid dune evolution on the spit, thereby creating a rather special landscape mosaic, where the cultural landscapes of the foredune, the mugo pine scrub, the cultivated moraine plain, and the pine forest plantations were found along with the natural landscapes of the shifting white and grey barchans, the relics of the parabolic dunes overgrown with natural mixed forest and wet dune slack



Mobile sand stabilization on the Curonian Spit

### 3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY

The Curonian Spit is a unique and vulnerable, sandy and wooded cultural landscape on a coastal spit which features small Curonian lagoon settlements. The Great Dune Ridge separating the Baltic Sea from the Curonian Lagoon was formed from sand transported by the southeast Baltic longshore sediment drift, and later covered by primeval forest. After intensive logging in the 17th and 18th centuries, the dunes began moving towards the Curonian Lagoon, burying the oldest settlements. At the turn of the 19th century, it became evident that human habitation would no longer be possible in the area without immediate action.

Rich with an abundance of unique natural and cultural features, Curonian Spit has retained its social and cultural importance. Local communities adapted to the changes in the natural environment in order to survive. This interaction between humans and nature shaped the cultural landscape.

Dune stabilisation work began, and has continued ever since. By the end of the 19th century, a protective dune ridge was formed

along the seashore to prevent inland sand migration, and the Great Dune Ridge was reinforced using trees and brushwood hedges. Currently, forests and sands dominate the Curonian Spit. Urbanised areas (eight small settlements) cover just about 6% of the land. The most valuable elements and qualities of the Curonian Spit cultural landscape are its unique size and general spatial structure, demonstrating the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

The most valuable elements and qualities of the Curonian Spit cultural landscape also include the characteristic panoramas and the silhouette of the Curonian lagoon; cultural elements including the remains of postal tracks, trade villages from the 10th and 11th centuries, traditional fishing villages and archaeological heritage covered by sand; the spatial-planned structure and architecture of traditional fishing villages turned into resort settlements (ancient wooden fishermen's houses, professionally designed buildings of the 19th century, including lighthouses, piers, churches, schools, villas). The Curonian Spit also features elements of marine cultural heritage.



*Traditional Curonian fishing boat kurenas*

This transnational cultural landscape also features natural and human-made elements including the distinctive Great Dune Ridge and individual dunes, relics of ancient parabolic dunes; a human-made protective coastal dune ridge; relics of moraine islands, seacoast and littoral forests and littoral capes; ancient forests, mountain pine forests and other unique sand flora and fauna including a bird migration path; and the social-cultural traditions, spirituality, and the social perception of the area, which reflect the local lifestyle formerly centred on fishermen, artists, scientists, yachtsmen and gliders, travellers and other visitors.

**Criterion (iv):** The landscape of the Curonian Spit takes its contemporary form from its long cultural history, adapting to the physical constraints of the geology and topography.

**Criterion (v):** The Curonian Spit is an outstanding example of a landscape of sand dunes that is under constant threat from natural forces (wind and tide). After disastrous human interventions that menaced its survival, the Spit was reclaimed by massive protection and stabilization works that began in the 19th century and are still continuing to the present day.

The entire area of the Curonian Spit cultural landscape reflects valuable qualities and underlying processes, retains historical functions and specific sustainable land use methods related to the peculiarities of the natural environment, and reflects the unique spiritual bond between humans and nature.

The boundaries of the World Heritage property are sufficient to express all the attributes of its Outstanding Universal Value. Some of these attributes, such as the fishermen's houses, need careful maintenance. In general, these attributes are particularly sensitive to pressures such as climate change, severe weather events, fire, excessive development and tourism. Because of the continuous evolution and development of the cultural landscape, it is very important to regulate the number of visitors to the property. New developments and other

economic activities must be regulated to avoid any irreversible changes that may threaten the Outstanding Universal Value.

The most vulnerable elements of the Curonian Spit cultural landscape are the oldest wooden fishermen's houses, the wooden decor of professionally designed buildings, and the human-made protective coastal dune ridge, which is influenced by the natural coastal processes under the influence of global climate change. The Curonian Spit showcases high landscape values. It is an example of a special landform subjected to human intervention and natural phenomena such as climatic variations. The former has been both catastrophic, as with the drastic deforestation in the 16th century, and beneficial, as demonstrated in the 19th century with the creation of artificial barriers against further incursions by the sea.

The cultural, natural and human-made elements of the Curonian Spit cultural landscape illustrate the most important features of its formation through their shapes, volumes, materials, and functions. The authenticity of the landscape is reflected by the tangible and spiritual values of the different historical periods that shaped its identity.



*Old graveyard in Nida*

The vitality, spirituality and special mood of the cultural landscape and its unique characteristics is further highlighted by authentic forms of local intangible heritage. These include the marine cultural heritage; traditional trades, folklore and artistic traditions; the ethnographic elements of the fishermen's lifestyles; unique methods of protective coast and dune ridge management and forest maintenance; sustainable recreational activities and a cultural leisure tradition dating back to the 19th century. All these authentic intangible features have

survived the political and population changes of the 20th century and were enriched by many new or readapted habits and traditions of the newcomers.



*Weather vanes of kurenas boats*

The Curonian Spit is protected by the Kuršiu Nerija National Park in Lithuania and the Kurshskaya Kosa National Park of the Russian Federation. The status of these National Parks guarantees the protection of the cultural landscape. Both National Parks have the common goal of preserving the natural and cultural attributes that express the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. A very important prerequisite for the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value is state land ownership by the National Parks. The governments of both states are responsible for the conservation of the Curonian Spit. In the Republic of Lithuania, the main

conservation responsibility lies on the Ministry of Environment and authorised agencies, and in the Russian Federation on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The protection of immovable cultural heritage is the responsibility of the cultural Heritage Department under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the State Service for Protection of cultural Heritage of the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. The Governments have created the National Parks authorities, who play a key role in the conservation of the property, forest and coastal management.

The territory of the Curonian Spit is administered by Neringa and Klaipeda City municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania and by the Federal State corporation National Park Kurshskaja kosa, along with the municipal unit of Kurshskaja kosa of the Zelenogradsk area of the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. The local authorities in the Republic of Lithuania determine the main trends of socio-economic development, manage and plan settlements, and generally take care of the protection and management of the territory by implementing territorial planning documents in the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit.

For the effective management and protection of the property's Outstanding Universal Value, closer collaboration of all institutions and stakeholders is needed within and between States. In the Republic of Lithuania, any activity posing a threat to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Curonian Spit is prohibited by the Law on Protected Areas (2001), and Protection Regulation of the Curonian Spit National Park (2002). In the Russian Federation, the relevant laws are the Federal Law of Specially Protected Nature Territories of the Russian Federation (1995) and the Law on Federal State Enterprise.

The local communities on both sides of the border are directly involved in the conservation of the property's tangible heritage and also carries the region's intangible heritage. However, different attributes of the property require different protection regimes and management activities.

Therefore, different zones have been established in the National Parks for various specific purposes, such as strict reserves, reserves, recreational, residential and other zones. All these measures are outlined in the territorial planning documents. The main territorial planning documents in the Republic of Lithuania are the Special Management Plan of the Curonian Spit (a territorial planning document adopted by the government in 2012), and the National Park Borders Plan (adopted by Parliament in 2010). Klaipeda's municipal General Plan has been in place

since 2007, while Neringa's General Plan was adopted by the municipality in 2012.

The preparation of a single territorial planning document for the management of the area, aiming to ensure the preservation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value in Lithuania is foreseen. The main territorial planning document in the Russian Federation is the Development Plan for the National Park Kurshskaja Kosa for 2009-2013. The coordination of actions between the States is necessary to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Once finalised and agreed upon, an integrated Curonian Spit Management Plan covering the whole property will be implemented in order to ensure the conservation of the Outstanding Universal Value, to improve cooperation between all institutions in both States, and to reach joint agreements on future activities.

The preparation of the Management Plan is an essential step in the appropriate management of the property and particular attention should be paid to addressing the major pressures potentially affecting it. The implementation of territorial planning documents and the safeguarding of the implementation of existing legislation are high priorities.



## 4. WORLD HERITAGE TOURISM SUPPLY SIDE

Very clean marine sandy beaches of the spit together with the nice traditional resorts inherited from the German Imperial period of 1871-1918, mature pinewoods, and the magnificent vistas over the mobile dunes and the lagoon form the most valuable tourism amenities of the southeast Baltic region.

The aesthetic appreciation of seaside dunes coincided with a dramatic development of mass seaside tourism. Starting from the second half of the 19th century, and further on into the first half of the 20th century, the Curonian Spit had experienced a remarkable development of the recreational infrastructure. Thus, In Nida, the heritage of the recreational architecture from that “golden age” was featured by the villa of Thomas Mann, German author and a Nobel Prize winner, as well as by Hotel Blode (destroyed during the World War II), which hosted the world-famous Nida colony of expressionist painters.

The Curonian Spit is indeed a tourist destination of an international scale. There are eight seaside resorts on the Curonian Spit. The permanent population of the spit is app. 5500 inhabitants, but every summer it hosts app. 2 million visitors. However, rapid development of tourism facilities is leading to irreversible changes of this area, which has been left almost intact until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Pressures by commercial land use negatively affect the ecological integrity of the nature on the spit, thus creating multiple management conflicts. In 1961 Nida, Preila and Pervalka settlements have been united into one municipality and were declared a city of Neringa, which enjoyed equal governance rights as Kaunas, Klaipeda or Palanga, in spite of its negligible population size. The results of the administrative reform allowed upgrading the importance of the spatial planning and landscape management for the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit and the level of integration for all projects of the Baltic Coast spatial planning, particularly for general plans

of Neringa and Palanga. The most famous of the planning ideas for that period was the revised concept of the Baltic seaside recreational development.

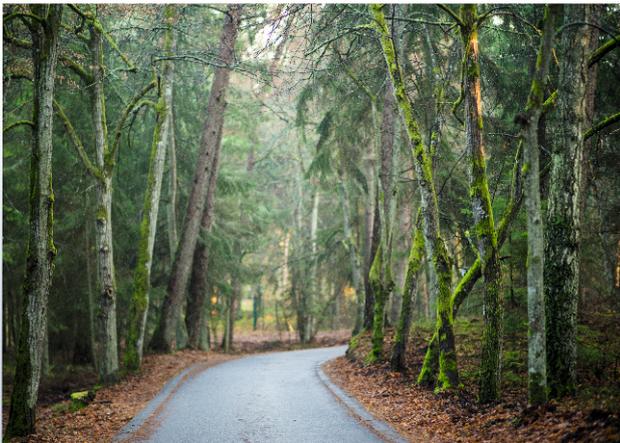
The concept of the Baltic seaside recreational development was based on a strict territorial differentiation of the profile and intensity of the development. Only 5000 tourists were allowed to stay on the Curonian Spit at one time during summer season, and the tourist flows were controlled by issuing permits to visit the spit. Tourists were staying in the facilities developed in the upgraded former German Imperial seaside resorts of Nida and Juodkrante, which had been created mainly in the 1890s, and the former fishing villages of Preila and Pervalka, where leisure facilities have been created anew.



*A villa of Jonas Žilnius-Jonila, Governor of Klaipeda Region in the Republic of Lithuania (1925-26)*

The possibility to rest on the Curonian Spit was strictly limited only to the privileged groups of the Soviet society. And the expansion of leisure facilities was largely controlled and regulated by the authorities (although not sufficiently enough, as it turned out by the 'end of the day').

The third stage in the management of the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit started in the period of Soviet 'perestrojka' (1985-1989), when the best condition for ideas of ecologically sustainable development became evident. Thus, the Integrated Nature Conservation Project of the Lithuanian Baltic Coast was completed in 1988 as a follow-up of the developed and officially endorsed Lithuanian Integrated Nature Conservation Scheme. It was the most comprehensive integrated spatial planning document of that

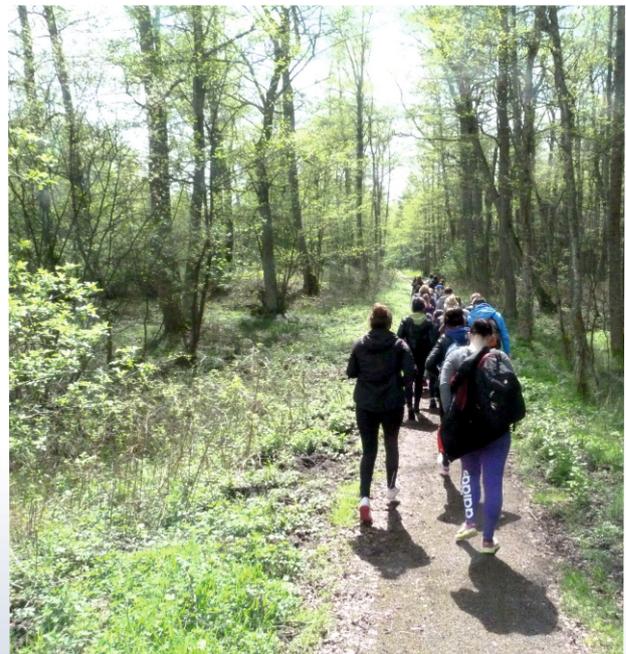


*A forest park in Juodkrante*

Although the dune and forest parks are managed for similar purposes, the essential difference between these two types, however, lies in their main function, different requirements for their spatial arrangement, the species composition of the vegetation, and in leisure amenities. A general landscape management principle in the recreational zones of forest parks around the settlements of the Curonian Spit is to reconstruct Mugo pine plantations into Scots pine plantations leaving only isolated groups or small groves, which are valuable from the aesthetic and educational points of view. In the dune parks, the spatial structure of forest plantations is

period for the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit, for the entire Baltic Sea coast of Lithuania, and for its hinterland as well.

Recreational zone on the Curonian Spit is designated to host and develop limited leisure facilities and amenities. It currently covers areas of leisure facilities as well as the forested areas (forest parks) around the settlements, bungalow areas and seaside resorts, which are currently functioning on Russian and Lithuanian sides of the spit. Two types of recreational zones are distinguished on the Curonian Spit. Forests, forested dune and foredune areas of the Curonian Spit which have primary recreational function are labelled either as dune parks, or as forest parks.



made more diverse and corresponds to the requirements of the prevailing recreational activity.

Referring to the number of TripAdvisor reviews left in 2016 to 2019 by the visitors in both national parks of the Curonian Spit, the most popular local tourism amenities (altogether over 100 TripAdvisor reviews) they visit are the following ones:

**The Dancing Forest** (353 TripAdvisor reviews). It is a pine forest on the Russian side of the Curonian Spit noted for its unusually twisted trees. The Scots' pine trees were planted in the 1960s and unlike many drunken forests, the trees in the Dancing Forest are twisted into several patterns, such as rings, hearts and convoluted spirals bending to the ground.

The exact cause of the trees' distortion is unknown. In the folk version, the Dancing Forest follows the movement of the sands. In the esoteric interpretation, the Dancing Forest reflects location's geomantic powers and is a sanctuary for healing various ailments.



*The Dancing Forest*

**The Nida beach** (187 reviews). “Lonely Planet“ regularly includes the Baltic Sea beach in Nida into the TOP 100 global list of pleasure beaches. No surprise, it is vast, 60 to 120 m wide, and composed of fine, well-sorted, clean sand. Since 2002, Nida beach is regularly awarded with the Blue Flag award.

It is equipped with necessary infrastructure: stairs to reach the beach, benches, changing cabins, children's playgrounds, beach volleyball courts, fresh water taps, toilets, ramps for people with disabilities to reach the beach. The Nida beach is free of charge. The outdoor cafes are situated next to the beach.



*The Baltic Sea beach at Nida*

**Lithuanian Maritime Museum** (170 reviews). It is the most popular paid attraction in the Baltic States that was opened in 1979 and each year attracts over 0.5 Mio of visitors. It is located in Koppalis (Germ. Süderspitze), the northernmost point of the Curonian Spit. Together with the adjacent Dolphinarium, the

area of the Lithuanian Maritime Museum is ca 33,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The bottlenose dolphin shows and sessions of individual communication with the dolphins are the most popular activities in the museum attracting thousands of visitors, especially children.



*Lithuanian Maritime Museum*

#### POPULAR HINTERLAND ATTRACTIONS

**Königsberg Cathedral with Immanuel Kant's Grave** (2827 reviews). It is a red brick Gothic-style monument in Kaliningrad, located on Kneiphof island in the Pregel (Pregolya) river. It is the most significant preserved building of the former City of Königsberg, which was largely destroyed in World War II. Dedicated to Virgin Mary and St Adalbert, it was built as the see of the Prince-Bishops of Sambia in the 14th century. The spire and roof of the cathedral burnt down after two RAF bombing raids in late August 1944. Reconstruction started in 1992. The tomb of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, the "Sage of Königsberg", is today in a mausoleum adjoining the northeast corner of the cathedral.



*Königsberg Cathedral*

**Fishing Village** (1295 reviews). Kaliningrad-Fischdorf is a district in the Russian city of Kaliningrad. The district is new but the buildings were erected in the style of the East Prussian capital of Königsberg. The district does not feature exact reconstruction of the

buildings from the German Imperial era. The project was funded by private companies and foundations from Germany, but also by the Russian government. It is a favourite recreational site of locals and visitors of Kaliningrad alike.

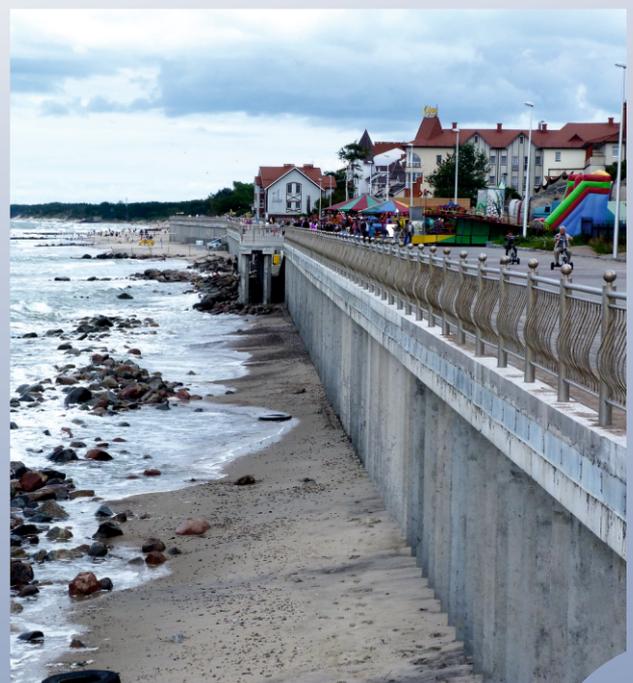


*Fishing Village*

**Kaliningrad Zoo** (1168 reviews). It was founded in 1896 as the Königsberger Tiergarten. Thus, the zoo is one of the oldest zoological gardens in Russia, and one of the largest. At present, the Kaliningrad Zoo extends over 16.5 ha and comprises 315 species with a total of 2264 individual animals. In recent years, the zoo has suffered from a lack of funding, sometimes even to the extent there is not enough food for the animals. Many of the animals survive by scrounging food from visitors.

water, which, naturally, is called “Zelenogradskaya”. It is pumped from the depth of 230 to 270 m and discharged from Queen Louise Mineral Water Well.

**Zelenogradsk Promenade with Queen Louise Mineral Water Well** (568 reviews). It is the most popular tourist attraction in Zelenogradsk seaside resort located along the Baltic Sea coast next to Kurshskaya Kosa National Park with a 150-meter pier and a park that merges with the National Park. The seaside resort also has abundant resources of its own mineral



*The Baltic Sea promenade in Zelenogradsk*

**Murarium - Art Collection of Cats and Monument to Cats in Zelenogradsk (566 reviews).** The Water Tower of Zelenogradsk is a symbol and the main visual feature of the resort. The 40-m-tall tower was built in 1904 for the municipal water supply and was distinguished by a peculiar dome. Currently, it hosts Murarium -the largest art collection of cats in the Russian Federation. The museum exhibits more than 4,500 interior items, decorations, paintings and other entertaining cat-themed things collected from around the world.

**Palanga Amber Museum and Park with Birute Hill (560 reviews).** It is located very close to the Baltic Sea in Palanga, Lithuania. It is housed in the restored 19th century Tiškevičiai Palace and is surrounded by the Palanga Landscape Park with Birute Hill. The museum's collection of amber comprises about 28,000 pieces, of which about 15,000 contain inclusions of insects, spiders, or plants. Ca. 4,500 pieces of amber are exhibited; many of these are items of artwork and jewellery.



*Palanga Amber Museum and Park*

**Palanga beach, promenade and pier (536 reviews).** The beach and promenade of Palanga are constantly swarming with 'mildly delirious and arrestingly beautiful people', making Palanga a good choice for those who like the lively burble and fizz of constant

action. 'Try-hard trendies' come here to show off in the sun, cool off in the water and bask in each other's marvellous presence. The beach and the dunes held by the pier are used by millions of tourists heralding Palanga as the largest Eastern Baltic seaside resort.



*Palanga beach, promenade and pier*

### ACCOMMODATION IN WHICH VISITORS STAY

On the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit, the median prices for a double room on a weekend night in a shoulder season are in the range of 50 to 100 €. It is impossible to find a room for less than € 30 a night on the booking.com platform on the Internet. It is reasonable to visit the spit and its attractions for a couple of days on a sunny weekend in May or September when there are not too many visitors on the beach, or on the lagoon coast.

Most of the city visitors arrive from the

mainland Lithuania to Neringa, the main seaside resort comprising over 80% of the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit by car, also in the shoulder season. They are lured by significantly lower entrance fees for motorized visitors compared to the peak season, albeit hotel prices are not much lower in the shoulder season compared to the peak season. Currently, not only visitors from Germany, like a few decades ago, but also affluent domestic guests can afford to spend a couple of nights and days in the pricey hotels of Neringa.



*A modernized hotel in Nida*

The supply of accommodation on the Russian side of the Curonian Spit is very different from the Lithuanian side, but also from the other South Baltic coastal UNESCO World Heritage tourism destinations because the Russian side of the Curonian Spit is an entirely different story. It is a national park and also a popular seaside resort, but only among the domestic visitors whose purchasing power has substantially declined during the last decade. The latest sharp depreciation of the rouble in comparison to the euro in 2014 has also taken its toll on the accommodation prices.

The majority of the visitors who come to the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit in shoulder seasons are domestic weekend visitors arriving by car. The Russian side of the Curonian Spit, in general, is best positioned to cater for World Heritage tourist interests in terms of accommodation supply.

Not only is the widest choice of cheap accommodation on the Russian side of the Curonian Spit compared to other coastal South Baltic World Heritage tourism destinations, but also their distribution reflects the greatest elasticity of accommodation prices. Only on the Russian side of the Curonian Spit, there are quite a few hotels which offer accommodation in the double room on a weekend night in the shoulder season for less than 50 euros per night. And there are plenty of different accommodation choices, although the quality might not be reaching strict European standards.

It's even more remarkable because Russia is widely considered as a tourist destination with a very bad price-and-quality ratio for accommodation and a very rigid price elasticity. It shows, that seaside tourism in the Kaliningrad Region is indeed robust in terms of the accommodation offer and a vast majority of holiday-makers staying there typically head to the beach to enjoy 3-S - 'sun, sand, and sea' and are looking for cheaper accommodation options. Many of them are also keen to experience the mature pine forests, which, according to the National Park staff, comprise the essential UNESCO World Heritage value of the Curonian Spit.

## FOOD AND DRINK ESTABLISHMENTS

Judging from the online reviews left by visitors of many nationalities on the TripAdvisor online review platform in both national parks on the Curonian Spit, the food quality varies very widely, The reviews range from 'Great traditional food', 'Superb cuisine' and 'Excellent beer' to 'Quantity over quality', or 'Tasteless but otherwise OK'. Many visitors do not expect high quality of staff for food and drink establishments (which is justifiable in Eastern Europe in the peak tourist season) and become very excited when the staff is friendly and can communicate in English and/or German.

The main focus and expectations of the visitors for local food and drink establishments is to taste traditional local seafood made in Russian and Lithuanian way. These expectations in the villages and towns of the Curonian Spit on both sides of the border can be satisfied with varying success.



## 5. WORLD HERITAGE TOURISM DEMAND SIDE

Unfortunately, the limits of our study didn't allow us to investigate the tourist demand on the Russian side of the Curonian Spit. Therefore, the results of the investigation presented below cover only the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit and, more specifically, Neringa Municipality as its major seaside resort. In 2018, Neringa has received ca. 62 thousand guest overnights, which was 3.7% more than in 2017. and proves that the visitors of the spit are currently interested in this resort only as a '3-S' traditional, albeit exquisite, seaside tourism destination.

Neringa suffers from high seasonality of tourism. The resort has notoriously low occupancy rate if statistics for the whole year is considered, even compared to other spa towns of Lithuania. It is hitherto not interesting or attractive for the visitors as a World Heritage destination.

Over 85% of tourists who stay overnight tend to come in the summer months from June to August. In contrast, there is a tiny number of guest nights from April to May and from September to October, which means in tourism shoulder seasons. As observed by the local heritage site managers, they would love to increase their products/service variety in the low season, which are based on nature and culture heritage. Moreover, the average length of stay of the visitors on the Curonian

Spit is remarkable low, just 2.5 days, the lowest among the all surveyed South Baltic coastal cultural World Heritage sites.

Main attractions, according to the Curonian Spit national park staff, are trips by boats on the Curonian Lagoon, guided tours for the groups, souvenir shops (especially amber), smoked fish and cultural festivals. Main improvement areas, according to the national park staff, are seasonality, quality of tourism infrastructure and tourism sector diversity. In particular SPA and wellness services are lacking, and public transport scarcity is a big problem in the peak season. Spa and wellness need to be developed, activities such as hiking, education based on nature and culture heritage (historical excursions, Nida art colony history, exhibitions, etc.) has to be developed as well as the culinary heritage of the Curonian Spit.

Mobile dunes serve as a core aspect of the Curonian Spit: without them, the spit would lose its identity, and there would be fewer visitors, but if the dunes were more impressive, visitors would not get more excited. Also, the park of wooden sculptures in a unique landscape of primaevial parabolic dunes of Juodkrante with a trail in the dunes is a core aspect as well. These sculptures were created 50 years ago and they became well embedded into visitors' consciousness, into their perception of what is the Curonian Spit.



*A group of tourists in the mobile dunes of Nagliu Strict Reserve*

The Top-6 food and drink establishments in the eyes of tourists of any nationality visiting the Lithuanian or Russian side of the Curonian Spit who left their reviews on the TripAdvisor platform are the following ones (in the order of scores, please note, that the food and drink establishments on the Lithuanian side are valued higher than the ones on the Russian side):

1. **Lyra** (Preila, LT) - It is the best place to eat on the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit. Cafe is located on a shore of Curonian Lagoon and that creates a romantic environment if it is not windy.

2. **Žuvele** (Juodkrante, LT) - absolutely very good local seafood. Nice ambience and very friendly and attentive staff. TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence 2018-2019 Winner.

3. **Rybny Dvor** (Rybachy, RU) - bringing together Russian, German and Central European cuisine traditions into a creative fusion.

4. **Tik pas Jona** (Nida, LT) - refined simple and original seafood cuisine with Lithuanian, Curonian and German accents (Fig. 9).

5. **Altrimo** (Rybachy, RU) - a cosy atmosphere and view, as well as an unexpectedly decent quality of service, charming decorations, very comfortable seating, very attentive staff, and wonderful food.

6. **Zuikio darzas** (Nida, LT) - creative cuisine, chic décor, cosy atmosphere and super friendly staff. It is the most non-trivial dining and wining place on the entire Curonian Spit ('A dream house in woods').



*Bream smoked traditional way on the Curonian Spit*

The Thomas Mann villa is a pivotal place for German tourists. Thomas Mann (1875-1955) was a winner of the Nobel Prize in literature and for the prize money, he had commissioned a villa on the Curonian Spit in the early 1930s. The villa itself is not a great amenity, and there are almost no authentic artefacts left there. However, the visually appealing edifice representing the traditional 'Curonian' style of rustic architecture, its historical significance and integration into the landscape are the core aspects of satisfaction for the visitors of the Curonian Spit.



*Thomas Mann villa in Nida*

On the other hand, since the Thomas Mann villa is a core aspect, it is not necessary to fill it with replicas or other artefacts as it won't enhance satisfaction of visiting this museum. Therefore, along with the mobile dunes and the Hill of Witches, the Thomas Mann villa is also a core aspect of the Curonian Spit without which the spit is unimaginable but whose upgrading is pointless. In the same way, visitors also regard the Amber Museum and Gallery in Nida as a core aspect of their visit to the Curonian Spit.

Period cottages and villas are also core aspects of the Curonian Spit that make the essence of the cultural landscape. This is in contrast with what the national park officials speak about the Outstanding Universal Value of the Curonian Spit.



*Period cottages in Nida*

The visitors of the Curonian Spit do not care about strengthening the integrity of the period cottages and the villas because it is essential that they just exist. Nobody really cares, if they are more authentic or not, if they are suitable for tourism or creative industries or not, are they transformed into second homes or not. It does not matter for visitors. It is sufficient just to maintain these period edifices in some basic satisfactory condition as visual landmarks of the aesthetically appealing coastal landscape.

Visiting the seaside, the opportunity to enjoy the beach and bathing is also a core aspect for the visitors on the Curonian Spit. Hence such a sharp seasonality of visitation. If some obstacles (bad weather, rough sea or other discomforts) prevented enjoying the beach, this led to decreased overall impression about the on the Curonian Spit. This core aspect also means that the quality of seaside beaches must be assured, but it is not necessary to invest more in any additional infrastructure. It is unnecessary to improve the quality of the ancillary services on the beaches.

The Blue Flag, the QualityCoast and the Green Destination awards can play an essential role as tokens that these core needs of visitors are met. The fact that visiting the seaside, the opportunity to enjoy the beach and bathing is a core aspect for visitors on the Curonian Spit, might probably explain at least partly such a low occupancy rate of accommodation enterprises on the spit. However, there might be other reasons which could reveal hidden problems of the Curonian

Spit as an unsustainable tourism destination. The transportation, guidance and information services are also essential for the visitors to the spit. They are core aspects and visitors who are disappointed with the quality of transportation, guidance or information have a worse impression of the destination. Hence, these services must be of good quality. Yet, the appraisal of the quality of transportation, guidance and information services shows no relationship to the overall impression of the visit.

Historical heritage is also the last core aspect without which it is impossible to imagine the Curonian Spit as a tourist destination. The friendliness of the local community is also considered a core aspect in the Curonian Spit, which determines the satisfaction of the stay as well. This aspect is particularly relevant regarding the influx of high season tourists when locals in many historic coastal World Heritage cities show hostility towards guests.

Accommodation as a core aspect means that if guests stay overnight on the Curonian Spit, most of them are not looking for luxurious hotels, they just need some basic quality accommodation which is enough for visitors because their aims are more oriented towards exploring the site instead of having deluxe overnight. On the other hand, if people are disappointed with the quality of accommodation, their overall impression about the visit is spoiled on the Curonian Spit. This should be kept in mind by urban planners and tourism service providers: accommodation services must be of a certain quality level, but there is no need to invest more in their further improvement.



*Fishermen's cottage converted into an accommodation facility*

Sunshine is also a core aspect for the Curonian Spit which is why most visitors come here, and if they don't get suntanned, their overall satisfaction with the destination is low; comfort and beauty is also very important for the visitors of the spit: this is what the local inhabitants highly appraise themselves and why they consider the Curonian Spit to be worthy of UNESCO-listing, according to the semi-structured interviews. It is also important for the visitors to understand the regulations of the national park, and souvenir vendors is a yet another core aspect.

The Curonian Spit is also associated with amber-related souvenirs and reminiscences, It is the very place where you can buy genuine amber, i.e., the Baltic 'gold', and it is of high quality. Also, those tourists who come to visit the spit in the cold season, can pick amber

right on the seaside beaches. Therefore, it is vital for Neringa Municipality just keeping the beaches clean, ensuring smooth access, maintaining clean water and nearshore, and providing an opportunity for swimming and amber catching. These activities which, if skilfully managed, can prolong the summer season, do not need massive investments either from the national park or from the municipality.



*Amber catching on the Baltic seaside beach*

Value for money is a vital competitiveness aspect for the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit. Indeed, very many visitors consider that the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit is quite pricey. Heritage sites are more expensive than ordinary destinations. If visitors are disappointed with what they get for the money, they do not like the

destination itself, and vice versa. Cleanness and tidiness is another important competitiveness factor for visitors to the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit. Catering is also important for the visitors, especially in the height of the summer season when the quality of food and services tends to decline.

Besides value for money, cleanness and tidiness, and catering, there are three features on the Curonian Spit, which could improve its competitiveness as a tourist destination. The Maritime Museum is a token of the Curonian Spit because it is famous for dolphins. Intelligent animals like dolphins held in captivity differentiate the public attitude towards the Maritime Museum emotionally. For those who dislike the Maritime Museum as a prison for dolphins, they do not like the entire Curonian Spit. It often happens that the visitors have not seen anything else on the Curonian Spit, just the Maritime Museum.

If the visitors of the Curonian Spit liked the Maritime Museum, they visited more places, enjoyed the Curonian Spit and were positive about dolphins being held captive - that the animals played and entertained visitors. Families with children in particular, are positive about the Maritime Museum.

The cycling path from Klaipeda to Nida is a second very important competitiveness aspect of the Curonian Spit. If the visitors like the quality of the paths and active leisure opportunities they provide, or if they are less demanding or staying off-season or just like cycling regardless of the conditions, they like their overall stay on the Curonian Spit. But those visitors who were dissatisfied with the quality of the cycling paths, were not satisfied with their active leisure conditions, they didn't enjoy their visitation to the Curonian Spit as a whole.

The third very specific competitiveness aspect of the Curonian Spit is the ferry and connectivity conditions between the spit and the continent. It is a limiting factor as it creates queues during the high season. If the visitors get frustrated with the waiting time for the ferry, then the satisfaction with their stay on the Curonian Spit fades away. It is the key competitiveness aspect: the faster visitors are served while entering or leaving the spit, the better was their overall impression with their visit. Reciprocally, the worse visitors suffered from the bad experiences with the ferry, the less they appreciated the spit.

The growth aspects are the agents of exclusivity or "wow" issues. The environment, quiet and peace are the main "wow" aspects on the Curonian Spit. Two other growth aspects are very pertinent for the spit as a World Heritage tourism destination: it is the information about UNESCO on the Curonian Spit. It is logical that visitors do not miss it and do not reproach the managers of the spit if they do not find any information on the UNESCO heritage. Yet, if visitors do receive the information about UNESCO during their stay on the spit, they become truly excited and enjoy their stay.

It is indeed remarkable that the Curonian Spit has succeeded to attract more foreigners than domestic visitors. Germany, along with Lithuania, Russia and Latvia are the main target countries where the Curonian Spit should be advertised and from where most of tourists are expected to come.

According to the information obtained from the Nida culture and tourism information centre "Agila", the list of top five nationalities visiting the Curonian Spit is led by Germany (37%) followed by Lithuania, Russia, Latvia, and France. It is mainly for two interrelated reasons. First, German tourists feel historical links with the area remembering that once it was part of the German Empire, and that famous German scholar, Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote his brother, the world-renowned geographer Alexander von Humboldt: 'The Curonian Spit is so unique, that you should see it the same way as Italy or Spain, if you do not want your soul to miss a wonderful sight...'

The second reason for the popularity of the Curonian Spit among German tourists is somewhat a more prosaic one. According to the tourism marketing and communication strategy of Neringa Municipality, Germany, along with Lithuania, Russia and Latvia, are indeed considered as the main and priority market-segment. The secondary priority market is a broader one led by France, the Netherlands, the UK, Italy, Spain and Austria. Last but not least, several countries are important target markets because of their vicinity: Belarus, Poland, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Ukraine, Norway, Denmark.

There are several more target countries which could be considered as a long-shot marketing target for discovering Neringa, including Switzerland, the USA, Slovenia, China, Japan etc. However, according to the Curonian Spit UNESCO World Heritage site manager, for the staff of Kursiu Nerija National Park, it is not important what nationality comes to visit the site. In any case, the staff has to focus on and cater to the needs of 'intellectual tourists' that are motivated and inspired by natural and cultural heritage of the Curonian Spit.

The duration of visiting the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit is very short. Just a quarter of all visitors stay there for a week or more. The average length of stay of short-term visitors is 2.0 days on Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit, according to the socio-demographic survey data and 2,5 days according to the information obtained from the Nida culture and tourism information centre "Agila". Remarkably, this pattern of the duration of stay does not concur on the popular anecdotal opinion that the World Heritage status of a tourist destination prolongs the stay.

The length of stay on Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit is more typical of the visitation pattern to non-destination seaside resorts. In these resorts, only a relatively small proportion of guests are long-term holiday-makers who are staying there for a week or longer.

Most of the visitors to non-destination seaside resorts are short-term, weekend guests arriving by car with a family or friends for leisure purposes and sightseeing. Concerning the goals of their visitation, on the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit, most visitors point to seaside tourism, or multiple purposes, as the main reason for visitation. Meanwhile, only 5.6 % of the visitors came explicitly to

experience and to get acquainted with the World Heritage. However, the visiting pattern of the summer guests to the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit is not fully consistent with the pattern typical for non-destination seaside resorts where regular short-term visitors prevail.

The fact that 34.6% of the summer visitors on the spit are on their first visit indicates that it is a mixed resort bearing features of both destination and non-destination resorts. Visitors to destination resorts travel longer distances, therefore destination resorts are located at places attractive enough to entice people to travel large distances to get there. Therefore, a relatively high proportion of the first-time visitors on the Curonian Spit and their wide geography shows that the Curonian Spit has many features of a destination resort.

The vast majority of the surveyed visitors on Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit are aware of the status of World Heritage awarded to this tourist destination, although only a small percentage of visitors came to see the World Heritage as their main visit objective.

Hence further, in-depth qualitative surveys of visitors' attitudes towards the World Heritage status of seaside tourist destinations are necessary. However, it can be noted that such a high level of awareness of the World Heritage status provides a good foundation for the development and implementation of heritage tourism strategies on the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit, and maybe any other DUNC project target destinations. However, there is an alternative opinion arguing that despite apparent importance of the UNESCO listing for cultural and heritage tourism, this is just an opportunity to be exploited. This alternative is also quite substantially supported by the investigation data.

## SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

1. Promoting cultural experiences of the World Heritage. Since one of the main objectives of tourism development on both sides of the Curonian Spit is to promote event tourism, enhanced efforts have to be taken to preserve the historic fabric and cherish traditional crafts. Examples of activities could be special theme weeks during shoulder seasons with a different focus on World Heritage (such as period dishes and clothing, boat construction, music and architecture). Conservation of traditional features of the Curonian Spit fishing villages should be the primary focus on both sides of the spit - maintenance or restoring of traditional roof and window elements, verandas, original wall and roof constructions, garden fences.
2. Outdoor experiences in the World Heritage. The priority interest of both national parks is to make the visitors to get out of car, move around in the landscape and explore. The Curonian Spit offers plenty of possibilities for outdoor activities, on land and on water. The priority is given to the expansion of the network of self-guided hiking trails - from restoring the pre-war network of footpaths based on historical documents to better connecting of self-guided hiking trails with mobile dune lookouts. This also implies promoting the spit as an attractive destination for active leisure in the overseas priority markets. On the territory of both national parks, access to the seaside will continue to be allowed only in specially designated places. However, visitors should not be prevented from hiking on the Baltic Sea beach even in the strict reserve areas.
3. Reducing seasonality: both national parks on the Curonian Spit want to extend the peak season at least from May to October. Kursiu Nerija National Park plans launching a traditional Autumn harvest festival in September in Nida. Meanwhile, Kurshskaya Kosa National Park puts the main emphasis on offering the visitors off-season organized educational tours. The educational tourism zones are being designated for guided visits on specially arranged trails, for wildlife- and bird watching guided tours, and for environmental education. These activities - traditional off-season events and education tours should be developed as concerted efforts in both national parks.
4. Improving the World Heritage infrastructure and making it more accessible to visitors. Transportation planning measures should be more actively applied to regulate and reduce car traffic flows, especially in central areas of the settlements and near the seaside beaches. Dedicated efforts should encourage vacationers to go to the seaside beach on foot and to travel on the Curonian Spit by bike, including transferring the knowledge on bicycle interactive stops approved in Kursiu Nerija National Park during the DUNC project to Kurshskaya Kosa National Park. Also, developing of a common transboundary system of heritage signage and online visitor guidance should be considered.
5. Development of the transboundary system of biking (on the spit) and water tourism (in the Curonian Lagoon) linking both national parks. A transboundary cycling path between Nida and Morskoye should be built linking both sides of the Curonian Spit. An international Russian-Polish-Lithuanian project "Creating a transboundary cycle route along an old postal route on the Curonian Spit: EUROVELO-BALTIC" should create a single cycling tourism system EuroVelo 10 on the entire spit. For the facilitation of the transboundary water tourism on the Curonian Lagoon, it is necessary to complete the access roads and harbour facilities in the river cargo and passenger multilateral checkpoint Rybachy.

6. The key tasks of facilitating water tourism in both national parks of the Curonian Spit are: promoting the travelling of tourists to, from, and along the Curonian Spit by water transport: development and adaptation of small harbours and marinas at the settlements on both sides of the Curonian Spit for accepting hydrofoils and period boats; promotion and facilitation of boat excursions by providing necessary guidance support for boat excursions aimed to explore the Curonian Spit and the highest mobile dunes from the Curonian Lagoon, including possible transboundary visits; promotion of leisure activities on the lagoon (sailing, windsurfing, angling, etc.); promotion and support of the construction and usage of ethnographic boats - Kurenas - by providing information assistance and involvement in various projects, including transboundary ones.

7. Dedicated conservation efforts for the World Heritage landscape based on combining the protection of cultural landscape values with the interests of the Curonian Spit residents and visitors. These efforts include the maintenance of the main structural elements of the landscape. Particular attention must be paid to the protection and sustainable management of the Great Curonian Dune Ridge and the foredune of the Baltic Sea, an open coastal plain (palve) on the Curonian Lagoon coast and deflation hummocks (kupstyne) at the foot of grey and mobile dunes.

8. Develop augmented reality (AR) experience of South Baltic World Heritage. The start-up pilot idea is to develop and apply a dedicated AR tool for experiencing the central part of the Great Curonian Dune Ridge between Nida and Morskoye as it was 100 years ago seen from the lookouts on Parnidis Dune on the Lithuanian side and on Kaspalege Dune (at Lake Lebed) on the Russian side. It may have a strong educational effect showcasing the recent evolution of the great Curonian mobile dunes in the last century and the necessity for their conservation.



*Self-guided dune trail on the Russian side of the Curonian Spit*

## SUMMING-UP

From the conservationists' point of view, the aim of the management measures is to highlight the general spatial structure of the cultural landscape featuring the coexistence of man and nature, and the distinctive expressive panoramas and silhouettes from the side of the Curonian Lagoon. Each new phase, each period, and each new socio-economic trend create a new challenge to preserve the values for which this landscape was UNESCO-listed. On the other hand, the landscape is appreciated not only for its cultural, but also for its natural heritage values, especially the highest mobile and grey dunes. These values also need to be actively protected.

A common Soviet legacy provides an important transboundary co-operation framework for both national parks established nearly simultaneously. Also, from the perspective of the south Baltic regional development, and from a broader European perspective, the Curonian Spit is seen as the key area for sustainable tourism development. Hence, if properly managed, it could be transformed into a flourishing hub of transboundary sustainable heritage tourism on a regional scale. In order to achieve this aim, however, there is an acute need to establish mechanisms for overcoming differences in conservation and heritage management in Russia and Lithuania practiced and enforced by the staff of the national parks and approved by the relevant state bodies.

It is important to strengthen the transboundary connections to express cohesion in the landscape and to further develop the cultural landscape as part of the World Heritage. Therefore, the planning process touches problems which can be solved only by a joint transboundary economic, social and environmental planning and concerted efforts in the whole area. For practical purposes, a joint World Heritage Site management plan will be inevitably implemented separately by each national park directorates in Lithuania and in Russia. However, the review of its implementation could and should be organized and directed by a joint Management Forum. In any case, the planning of the transboundary World Heritage Site will strongly rely on the previously established relationships and co-operation among the national park managers in Lithuania and in Russia.

Sustainable heritage tourism can help to maintain the dynamic balance between the natural and human environments on the Curonian Spit. However, it is a very intricate and complex issue. The current tourism development patterns in the Curonian lagoon region are characterised by the enormous disproportions regarding their geographical distribution. Smiltyne is the most frequented tourism area on the spit with over 2 Mio. annual visitors. But these are only day-trippers visiting the Maritime Museum and the seaside beaches. Other areas on the Curonian Spit have a much less share in provision of tourism services. There are also very huge disproportions in terms of the distribution of tourists over the year, as mentioned before.

Sustainable tourism planning and management occur in the changing society, characterised by different individuals and groups, differing value systems, erratic and often conflicting interests. A strategic priority should be to create a collaborative network that could include all essential stakeholders in heritage and tourism management. The heritage wardens typically cherish and promote 'scripted themes'. These themes concentrate on upholding the authentic Outstanding Universal Value regardless of its tourist appeal or interest. Meanwhile, many visitors and local tourism businesses prefer 'enterprise themes.' These themes focus on place-related myths and on the commodified tourist appeal, which is not necessarily associated with the authentic Outstanding Universal Value.

