

10-13 November, PALANGA, LITHUANIA

# 13th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum

## Reviving tourism in times of global change

# Summary



European  
Regional  
Development  
Fund

Lithuania hosted the 13th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum ‘Reviving tourism in times of global change’ (BSTF) on 10-13 November 2020 under the conditions of an unprecedented and uncertain situation of COVID-19. The BSTF has been one of the events of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States 2020-2021. The BSTF, organised by the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Tourist Board, was held online for four days for the first time.

The organisers of the BSTF took under the consideration the current issues and the priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency. The Lithuanian Presidency is focusing on achievable, practical, and visible priorities, one of which is dedicated to sustainable development as well as green and maritime tourism as an important sector in reviving regional economy, increasing the region’s visibility and giving employment opportunities to young people.

With more than 240 registered participants the BSTF became an inspiring event for all the members of the tourism society of the Baltic Sea Region, and to the international organisations including the UNWTO, the European Commission, the European Travel Commission, and the CBSS.

The BSTF has stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic is, first and foremost, a humanitarian crisis affecting people’s lives and triggering the global economic crisis. This pandemic has a very tangible impact on the tourism sector, which is critical for the people, destinations and businesses of the BSR. No doubt, the tourism sector is one of the most directly affected sectors in this current crisis and has been calling for immediate and long term responses.

In the BSTF, significant attention has been paid to the mobility, digitalisation, smart tourism, and Generation Z. The special platform for youth STENetY has been introduced. The mission of this platform is to strengthen the identity of the BSR as a Sustainable Region by the development of a sustainable tourism excellence network for the youth.

The participants of the BSTF agreed that today, more than ever, the coherence, concentration, and knowledge on how to work and create in these times of new reality is needed. The principles of sustainable tourism are becoming increasingly relevant, and the COVID-19 pandemic has permitted us to pay more attention to their value - as we travel more in our countries we discover new things, get a better understanding of the environment, local people and the region.

As a result, we create and offer tourism products much more responsibly. Our additional efforts have to be dedicated to set the basis for a better, more resilient and more sustainable future of tourism.

In this light, the awards were presented to the winners of the 1st Sustainable Tourism Competition of the Baltic Sea Region.

The domestic tourism became an important factor in the summer season of the pandemic in 2020. Representatives of the NTO's of the region presented challenges, opportunities and undiscovered potential of domestic tourism. In most cases, even the significant growth in domestic tourism cannot compensate for the losses in the incoming tourism. It was agreed, however, that the tourism sector of the BSR is facing not only challenges but also opportunities.

In the framework of the Lithuanian Presidency in the CBSS, the tourism ministers and high-level representatives from the CBSS member states have gathered to discuss the Times of new beginnings - Where do we go from here?

Due to the travel restrictions, the pandemic has obviously paused the cooperation among the Baltic Sea countries to some extent. However, knowledge exchange, sharing of best practices and solutions and learning from each other is more important than ever before and cannot be stopped by any crisis. The countries' representatives shared the lessons learned in the summer season, and provided information on the future vision and strategic long-term planning process as well as on short-term measures aimed to secure jobs and save businesses in the tourism industry and other interdependent sectors as well as to ensure safety for people and the society.

The time of the crisis has paved the way to new solutions in tourism services and products. The crisis has accelerated the important trends, such as the digitalisation and transformation of the tourism sector towards sustainability.

The high-level representatives unanimously agreed that cross-sectoral cooperation at national, regional and transnational levels in the BSR is of vital importance striving to provide effective support for resilience and a speedy recovery of travel activities in the Region.