



Off-Season Potential for Water Tourism SMEs

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Dreverna, Lithuania

LIGHT IN THE DARK

The project Light in the Dark helps small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector create an off-season nature-based offer to attract tourists to rural and coastal areas of the northern Baltic Sea region all year long.

01.11.2023 – 31.10.2026

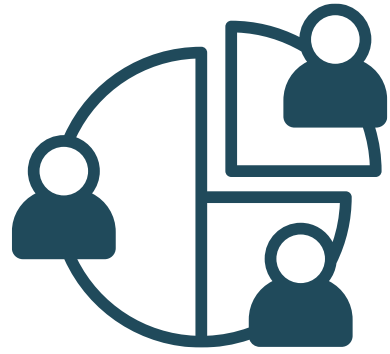
11 Project partners

Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, Lithuania, Åland islands

- The project analysed the **needs and expectations of off-season nature travellers** in the Baltic Sea Region to understand what kind of tourism offers can attract demand;
- Based on this knowledge, **SMEs developed and tested** off-season tourism products in rural and coastal areas, gaining practical evidence on what works in real conditions;
- The project also created a **common approach for product development**, grouping offers into **three experience types** and defining key principles for successful off-season experiences;
- A key result is a set of practical tools for SMEs, including a **digital guide** and an **idea generation tool** to support step-by-step product development based on data, testing and real experience.



TYPICAL OFF-SEASON NATURE TOURIST*



Demographic Profile

- 25–44 years old
- travels in couples or small groups
- prefers short trips (1–3 days)



Interests and Activities

- hiking and spending time in nature
- simple, high-quality activities (e.g. wellbeing, sauna)
- discovering local culture



Motivation for Off-Season Travel

- desire to avoid seasonal overcrowding and tourist flows
- interest in a calmer, more authentic environment
- opportunity to focus on a personal nature-based experience



Key Decision-Making Factors

- natural environment and scenery
- overall quality of the experience
- price-to-value ratio
- ease of booking

* Based on the international visitor analysis carried out within the Light in the Dark project (~5000 respondents, 9 countries)

Main conclusion - Off-season tourism demand is driven by the desire for peace, quality and authenticity.

DURING THE PROJECT, PRODUCTS WERE DEVELOPED OR IMPROVED WITHIN THREE EXPERIENCE GROUPS

LOCAL LIFESTYLE



Authentic everyday life, people and traditions

Experiences rooted in everyday local life, shaped by people, food, traditions and personal stories.

They focus on meaningful human interaction and offer a genuine sense of place beyond typical tourist attractions.

NOURISHED BY NATURE



Calm, reflection and reconnection

Nature-based experiences designed for slowing down, restoring balance and reconnecting with the natural environment.

They invite visitors to pause, breathe and experience nature as a source of well-being and personal renewal.

ACTIVE ADVENTURES



Accessible outdoor experiences for all

Soft outdoor activities that make adventure approachable and inclusive, regardless of age, fitness or prior experience.

They focus on safe, guided exploration of nature, combining activity with comfort and calm.

WHAT EXACTLY WAS PILOTED?

25 off-season tourism products developed

15 products piloted with real visitors

195 visitors involved

Piloting period: 2024–2025

Desktop Test → Pre-Pilot Expectations → Post-Pilot Evaluation

Rural and coastal areas across the Baltic Sea Region

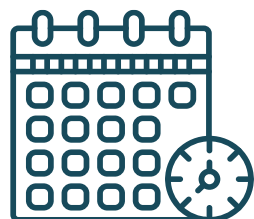
Developed by SMEs

Visitors included SMEs, DMOs, education & research partners and potential clients

Participants from project countries and beyond (e.g. Luxembourg, UK, Germany, Singapore)

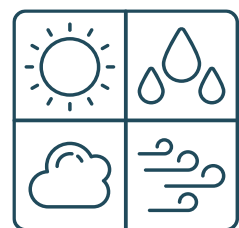
WHAT KIND OF PRODUCTS WERE DEVELOPED?

Duration



- Short getaways (1–3 days)
- Easy to combine with weekends and microtrips

Season & weather



- Mainly autumn, winter and spring
- Designed for changing weather conditions
- Focus on atmosphere, not "perfect weather"

Activity level



- Soft adventure rather than extreme tourism
- Suitable for beginners and casual travellers

Typical elements



- kayaking & canoeing
- hiking & coastal experiences
- sauna & wellbeing
- local food & storytelling
- nature immersion & silence

Key Decision-Making Factors



- natural environment and scenery
- overall quality of the experience
- price-to-value ratio
- ease of booking

The products were designed as realistic, bookable and experience-driven off-season offers for real market demand.

WATER TOURISM IN THE OFF-SEASON

**4 water-based tourism products developed 3
live-piloted in real off-season conditions**

What the pilots showed

Water-based products performed well beyond the summer season, especially when positioned as soft adventure rather than physically demanding activity.

The strongest results came from products that combined:

- calm nature and quiet landscapes
- clear safety guidance
- professional local guiding
- small-group atmosphere
- storytelling and a sense of discovery



Off-season water tourism works when visitors feel safe, prepared and emotionally connected to the place, not only when the weather is perfect.



Active adventures

A unique combination of wind, water and sand.

Comfortable stylish outdoor chairs, legendary Wet Weim picnic basket

Practicing some basic canoe paddling action

Mighty Sands Canoe Tour

Handmade cedar strip canoe, handmade wooden canoe paddle, set of chairs, picnic basket full of goodies

We will travel from Klaipeda to the village of Pervalka, passing Juodkrante town with its peaceful embankments. Our launch site is the Pervalka bay. Here we will start with a briefing, introduction to canoe paddling and will practice some basic canoe strokes in the local marina.

Afterwards, we will proceed to the Pervalka Lighthouse. We will paddle along the shore, enjoying picturesque views of the dunes, the Curonian Lagoon and of course, the main landmark of this trip, the Pervalka Lighthouse. After a short photoshoot at the lighthouse (no need to risk your own equipment, your guide will take pictures with his camera and a drone) we will paddle towards the dunes. Here we will set our camp for our favorite picnic basket lunch. Simply sit back, have a glass of wine, a cup of coffee or tea and enjoy the view.

Once we've finished, we will head back to the starting point. On our way back we will make two stops: first, at the famous heron and cormorant colony, one of the largest colonies of these birds in Europe, second, in Juodkrante village (former Schwarzort).

Activity facts:

Duration: 3,5 hours

Location: Curonian Spit National Park, transportation by a minivan

Season: Late spring, summer, early fall.

No. of participants: 2 - 8 persons

Level of activity/previous knowledge required: None

What to bring: Dress accordingly to the weather conditions.

Whats included in the experience: Transfer, equipment, guide.

Price: 100 euro/person incl.VAT

Wet Weim

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MIGHTY SANDS CANOE TOUR

Lithuania

A guided canoe tour in the Curonian Lagoon combining physical activity, nature and cultural landmarks.

Pre-pilot expectations → Post-pilot evaluation

(average score, scale 1-5)

- Overall quality: 3.8 → 4.5
- Off-season suitability: 3.4 → 3.7
- Booking likelihood: 3.7 → 4.7
- Product description accuracy: 3.8 → 4.5

Key data insight

Booking likelihood increased by +1.0 after participation

What the data shows

Experiencing the product significantly increased confidence in its value, safety and overall quality.

Key takeaway

Hands-on testing is especially important for active, weather-dependent experiences.



Moonlight Safari Paddling

Glide through the serene waters of one of the world’s most beautiful places: the Stockholm Archipelago. With your guide, you’ll paddle toward the setting sun as it slowly dips below the horizon, giving way to the moon and stars that will illuminate the sky.

The adventure begins in Gräddö, an idyllic archipelago village in the northern part of the Stockholm Archipelago. Your evening starts with an outdoor-cooked dinner featuring flavors of Swedish nature prepared under the open sky.

After dinner, you’ll receive an introduction to the basics of sea kayaking before launching your kayak just as the sun starts to set over the Baltic Sea. Along the way to Lidö, your guide will reveal hidden gems of the archipelago. The kayaking ends under a blanket of stars, and on Lidö, a warming cup of tea and a cosy night’s sleep in a charming cabin await you.

The following day, we will serve you a healthy breakfast. Then, you will have time to explore Lidö’s nature on a self-guided hike. When hunger strikes, your guide will teach you fire-making skills, and together, you’ll prepare lunch over an open fire while enjoying the stunning views.

After lunch, our boat will pick you up for a seal and eagle safari around the small islets and skerries furthest out in the archipelago next to the horizon. A traditional Swedish “fika” is served before the journey concludes back in Gräddö, where it all began the day before.

Activity facts:
Duration: 24 h
Location: Gräddö, about 100 km from Stockholm city center
Season: mid-August – end of September
No. of participants: 4/8
Level of activity/previous knowledge required: Beginner
What to bring: Clothes to paddle and hike in, shoes for an easy walk in the forest, night clothes.
Whats included in the experience: Sea kayak and all necessary safety gear, guide during the sea kayaking, accommodation in 2 bed-cabin with toilet inside the cabin. Showers in separate cabin, shared with others in the group. Seal and eagle safari. Dinner cooked outside, evening tea/snack, breakfast, lunch cooked over open fire, swedish fika.
Price: 495 euro/person incl. VAT

Active adventures

Magical paddling under the stars combine with a full day in the archipelago

Calm, curiosity, togetherness, and the power of nature, which invites a harmonious and memorable experience.

All-inclusive 24 hour get-away

Sea kayaking

Hiking

Cooking over open fire

Eagle and seal safari by boat.

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MOONLIGHT SAFARI PADDLING

Sweden

A moonlight kayaking experience combining paddling, outdoor dining and shared moments in nature.

Pre-pilot expectations → Post-pilot evaluation

(average score, scale 1–5)

- Overall quality: 4.0 → 4.2
- Off-season suitability: 3.7 → 4.0
- Booking likelihood: 4.1 → 4.1
- Product description accuracy: 4.7 → 3.8

Key data insight

Product description accuracy decreased by -0.9 after participation

What the data shows

The emotional core of the experience performed very well, but several elements did not fully match the initial description, affecting clarity after the pilot.

Key takeaway

For atmospheric, emotion-driven products, alignment between story and delivery is critical.



Active adventures

An authentic river experience: here you can experience a perfect kayaking experience admiring the local nature.

Season: experience nature waking up on a spring morning.

For an extra charge: you can stay in tentsile camping after the excursion.
Close by: only an hour's drive from Helsinki area and Helsinki-Vantaa airport.

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IN THE MIDST OF NATURE – KAYAKING TRIP FROM STRÖMFORS

Finland

A peaceful kayaking experience from Strömfors ironworks to the Kymijoki River, combining soft adventure, nature, local stories and mindfulness

Pre-pilot expectations → Post-pilot evaluation

(average score, scale 1–5)

- Overall quality: 4.3 → 4.8
- Off-season suitability: 3.8 → 4.6
- Booking likelihood: 4.0 → 4.7
- Product description accuracy/clarity: 4.2 → 4.6

Key data insight

All key scores increased after the pilot.

What the data shows

The experience worked very well in real off-season conditions. Participants valued the guide, safety, calm river setting and storytelling.

Key takeaway

A strong guide and emotional quality can turn a simple outdoor activity into a memorable off-season product.

In the midst of nature - a kayaking trip from Strömfors ironworks to the Kymijoki River

We start our kayaking trip from the western lower branches of the Kymijoki River, in the heart of the idyllic Strömfors ironworks. We paddle along the beautiful Kymijoki River and visit the Saarela nature reserve. On the way, we stop for a coffee and snack in Hattarniemi. On the way you will sense the silence, the movement of the water and the rich local nature and its polyphonic soundscape. Throughout the trip, our experienced guide will be with you, offering guidance and advice. Come with us and experience the joy of being on the water and feel the closeness and peace of nature.

Product highlights

A true paddling experience: the western branches of the Kymijoki River offer a peaceful and natural experience, with birds nesting on the banks. Choose from standard kayaks or a 10-person canoe.

Bird life: the Kymijoki River has a diverse bird life, including grey herons, which thrive in the area.

Stories, history: The guide tells the interesting story of the river, how the river once divided the Swedish and Russian empires and the importance of the river to the timber industry.

Activity facts:

Duration: 6 hours

Location: Strömforsin ruukintie 17, Loviisa 07970, Finland

Season: 28.4. – 2.6.2025

No. of participants: 3-25 pax

Good to know: Weather reservation: we take prevailing weather conditions into account. No previous kayaking experience is required.

What to bring: Outdoor clothing and footwear according to weather conditions.

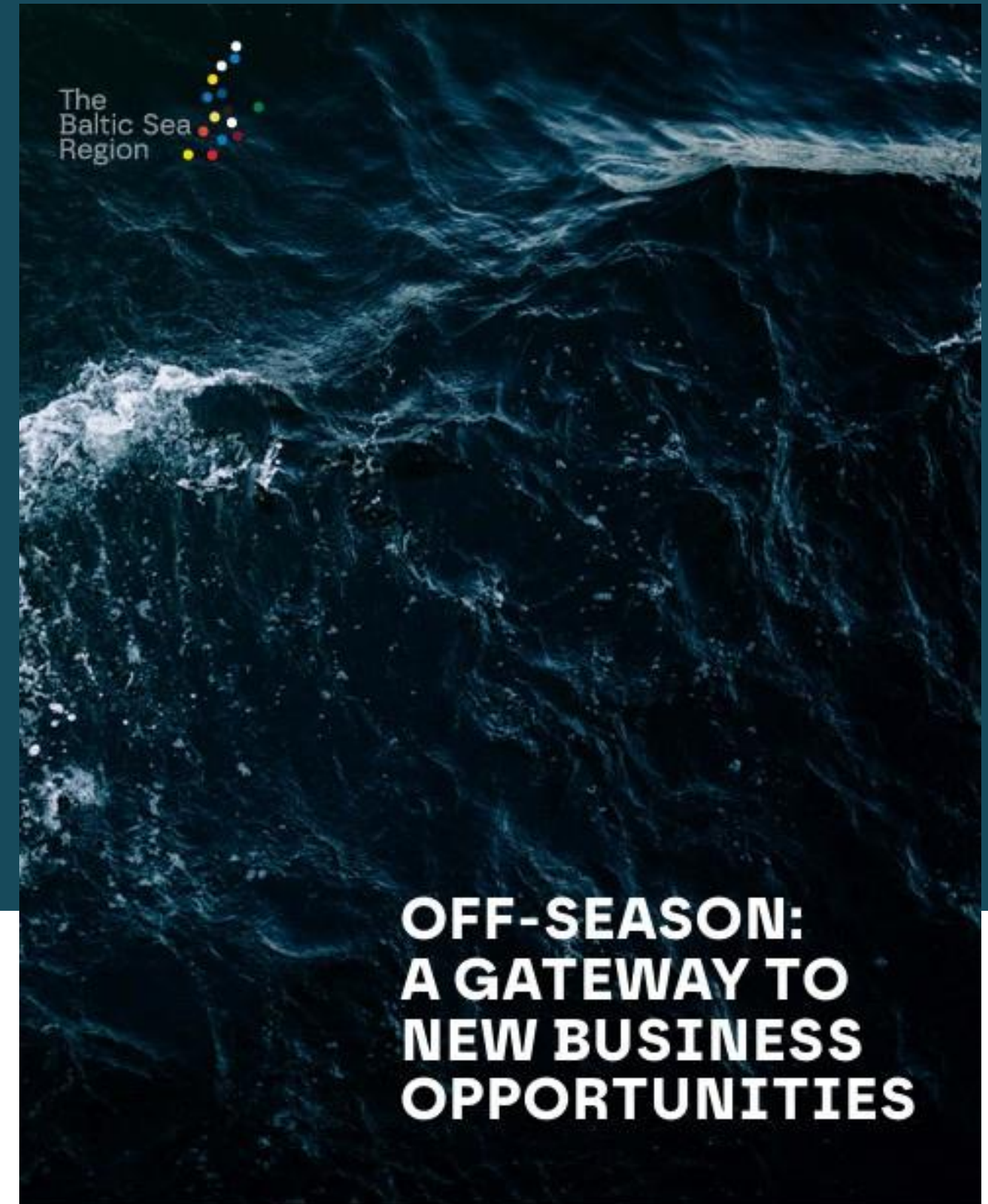
Whats included in the experience: Kayak rental, Paddling equipment, life jackets, opening covers, kayaking instruction + safety information section, guided kayak trip, coffee + snack.

Price: 70 euro/person incl VAT

Practical materials and inspiration for SMEs developing new tourism products

The **digital guide** helps SMEs develop off-season tourism products in a structured way, using real tested examples and practical recommendations.

Idea → Target audience → Product concept → Pricing → Marketing → Improvement



Idea Generation Tool

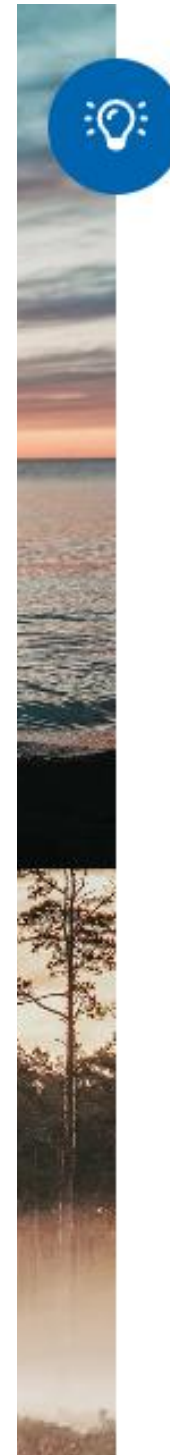
The Light in the Dark AI Idea Generator helps tourism SMEs create off-season tourism product ideas tailored to their location, resources and target audience.

How it works

1. SMEs enter basic information about their business
2. (location, resources, target audience, seasonality, etc.)
3. The tool combines this with project knowledge, pilot results and AI support.
4. The result is personalised off-season product ideas and development suggestions.

Result - Concrete product concepts and inspiration for further development.

<https://lightinthedark.bojaco.com>



IDEA GENERATOR

Discover new ways to make the off-season your advantage.

Light in the Dark – The idea generator helps tourism businesses uncover fresh, experience-driven concepts that match your place, your resources and your guests.

Answer a few quick questions and get **unique, personalized ideas** grounded in the project's deep knowledge of nature, local culture and off-season adventures across the Baltic Sea region.

Turn the quieter months into your strongest season!

This is how it works

- 1 Answer a few short questions about your business
- 2 You get suggestions for off-season experiences **that fit nature tourism and your company profile**
- 3 Pick your favourite idea and start growing your off-season potential

Ready? Let's go!



More useful information

<https://lightinthedarkbsr.eu/>



Nourished by nature

Active adventures



THANK YOU

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