



Terms of Reference for IUCN Consultancy

Title: Community tourism development in the Vjosa Valley

Objective of the consultancy

This consultancy has the following objective(s):

1. Create an enabling environment within the Vjosa Valley that is recognized as a benchmark destination for responsible and sustainable community-led tourism development.
2. Empower local residents to actively participate in and benefit from the tourism industry through supporting development of viable and sustainable community enterprises, products and activities.

Background

Project Reference: P04548

About IUCN

IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,400 Member organisations and around 17,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership enables IUCN to fill the role of incubator and trusted repository of best practices, tools and international standards.

IUCN provides a neutral space in which diverse stakeholders including governments, NGOs, scientists, businesses, local communities, indigenous peoples organisations and others can work together to forge and implement solutions to environmental challenges and achieve sustainable development.

Working with many partners and supporters, IUCN implements a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects worldwide. Combining the latest science with the traditional knowledge of local communities, these projects work to reverse habitat loss, restore ecosystems and improve people's well-being.

About the Project and the purpose of the Consultancy

The Vjosa River in Albania, one of Europe's last wild free-flowing rivers, was declared an IUCN Category II National Park in March 2023. This was made possible through an inspiring collaboration between IUCN, the Albanian Government, Patagonia, environmental NGOs and local communities.

Development of community tourism entrepreneurship and products in the Vjosa Valley is a crucial project component of the broader initiative aimed at conserving and effectively managing the newly established Vjosa River National Park. This work will promote sustainable community tourism in the Vjosa Valley aligned with the interpretation and sustainable tourism master plan¹ for the area and respond to a recent influx of domestic and international tourists in Albania. Developing the tourism sector is also a priority of the national government.

The proposed project component aims to establish conditions for an enabling environment that encourages responsible and sustainable community tourism development in the Vjosa Valley. The consultant will identify community tourism pilot initiatives; conduct training and capacity building; support communities in developing sustainable tourism enterprises, products and activities; facilitate promotion and integration into tour operator offerings; and help shaping long-term partnerships. Through these actions, the consultancy will lay the foundations for a sustainable, community-driven tourism model that benefits both local residents and the natural environment.

Expected Impact

The broader initiative aims to ensure that the outcomes of this consultancy contribute to:

- Integration of community tourism approaches and lessons learned from the Vjosa Valley into regional and national tourism strategies.
- Continued capacity development enabling local communities to manage and further innovate in sustainable tourism independently.
- Lasting positive environmental, cultural, and socio-economic impacts in the Vjosa Valley, positioning it as a model for sustainable tourism development.

Specific tasks

Selection of pilots, stakeholder engagement and capacity building

- Selection of pilot communities based on key insights from analysis of the market, stakeholders and value chain focused on ensuring the success of community tourism entrepreneurship products and activities development.
- Conduct in-depth community and stakeholder consultations. Prepare a summary report of consultation findings, highlighting opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for pilot activities.
- Facilitate workshops and conduct capacity building training modules for pilot communities to:
 - Increase community awareness about the benefits of sustainable community tourism.

¹ <https://akzm.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Chapter-F.-Tourism-Masterplan.pdf>

- Enhance understanding, skills and knowledge of sustainable and responsible community tourism practices, hospitality management, customer service, marketing, promotion and entrepreneurship.
- Develop common visions and inclusive action plans for sustainable community tourism products, activities and practices.
- Support the establishment of a peer-to-peer learning network connecting existing and new community tourism enterprises, tour operators, public sector actors, and NGOs. Facilitate collaboration with national and international tour operators to integrate market ready community tourism products and activities into their tour offerings and packages.

Development of tourism products and activities

- Assist communities in developing sustainable tourism products and activities that highlight cultural, historic, and natural heritage, ensuring sustainable and responsible tourism practices are integrated throughout the process.
- Develop multi-day package offerings and support community tourism enterprises in refining the products and activities based on pilot phase feedback and market demand.

Marketing and Promotion

- Develop and support the implementation of branding and promotional materials, including web-based platforms and social media channels, to showcase community tourism packages and provide booking information.
- Facilitate promotional activities and outreach, including organizing FAM trips with strategic partners and the Vjosa National Park Administration Office, and engaging travel bloggers, influencers, and media outlets to raise awareness of community tourism initiatives in the Vjosa Valley.
- Collaborate with travel agencies, tour operators and online booking platforms to promote and integrate the community tourism products and packages into their offerings.

Partnerships and Collaboration

- Forge partnerships and identify potential sources of financial support from international organizations, tourism grants, and responsible tourism funds to invest in infrastructure, capacity building, and marketing initiatives.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

- Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation system to track the social, economic, and environmental impacts of community tourism enterprises, products, and activities, incorporating feedback from visitors and local communities for continuous improvement.
- Develop guidance and best practice recommendations on community tourism development in and around protected areas, drawing lessons from the Vjosa Valley pilot initiatives.

Duration of the Assignment

From January 2026 to April 2027

Deliverables and Activities

The consultant will provide the deliverables and carry out the activities outlined in the table below. In addition, the consultant will have monthly meetings with IUCN and provide quarterly technical and financial progress reports.

			2026				2027	
1. Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity-building			Activity Duration					
#	Activities	Deliverables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
1.1	By end of Q1 2026, select and secure commitment from at least 3 pilot communities. Engage, convene meetings and conduct in-depth consultations with relevant stakeholders, including local communities, NGOs, ministries, government agencies and tourism operators, to collaborate on the development of community tourism enterprises.	Summary report of selected pilot communities and based on the consultation findings, a community tourism development strategy highlighting opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for pilot activities.						
1.2	By end of Q3 2026, conduct capacity-building workshops and training programs for local communities in the Vjosa Valley project area. Ensure diverse participation including of women and youth.	- Conduct minimum 1 capacity-building workshops and 1 training program in each of the 3 communities. - List of participants, gender and age groups.						
1.3	Create and implement a peer-to-peer learning network that enables established and new community tourism enterprises, tour operators, public sector and civil society organizations.	Enrolment of all 3 communities into the learning network						

2. Develop Tourism Products and Activities

#	Activities	Deliverables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
2.1	By Q2 2026, cross-check the assessment of the community tourism experience and the potential of the Vjosa Valley, including its natural and cultural assets, unique experiences and community resources.	Written analysis of assessment of the community tourism experience and potential of the Vjosa Valley						
2.2	By Q4 2026, support identified community-owned enterprises in the development of tourism products,	At least 1 product, experience or activity						

	activities and experiences that highlight cultural, historic and natural heritage.	developed in each of the 3 pilot communities						
2.3	By Q1 2027, design multi-day tourism packages that link diverse activities, i.e. adventure, nature, cultural and hands-on educational experiences. Ensure the inclusion of sustainable and responsible tourism practices throughout the product development process.	At least 1 multi-day tourism package including all 3 pilot communities						

3. Marketing and Promotion

#	Activities	Deliverables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
3.1	By end of assignment, integrate community tourism into a cohesive branding strategy for the Vjosa Valley that highlights its unique selling points, positive impact initiatives and community ownership.	- Branding strategy outline - Convened meeting with the Vjosa NP Administration Office						
3.2	By end of assignment, create or utilise an attractive and user-friendly web-based platform and social media channels to showcase the community tourism packages with booking information for the experiences.	Community tourism packages integrated into web-based platform and social media channels						
3.3	Collaborate with travel agencies, tour operators and online booking platforms to promote and integrate the community tourism products and packages into their offerings by end of assignment.	At least 3 community tourism products (See Deliverable 2.3) are integrated into tour offerings						
3.4	Organize, in collaboration with strategic partners, students, and the Vjosa NP Administration Office, a series of FAM trips that introduce potential buyers to the Vjosa Valley community tourism offer, implemented before the end of the assignment.	- At least 3 FAM trips including the community tourism products organised - Collect and integrate feedback into community tourism product development						
3.5	By end of assignment, engage with travel bloggers, influencers, and media outlets to generate positive publicity and increase awareness about the community tourism enterprises in the Vjosa Valley.	- Garner positive media coverage, securing features in at least three prominent travel publications or media outlets - Generate a 30% increase in social media mentions related to community						

		tourism in the Vjosa Valley within the project duration						
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4. Partnerships and Collaboration

#	Activities	Deliverables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
4.1	Forge partnerships between local communities, NGOs, and relevant government agencies to establish a framework for the sustainable and responsible management of community tourism activities, by end of assignment,	- Established strategic partnerships between pilot communities, NGOs, Vjosa National Park Administration Office - Meeting minutes						
4.2	By Q1 2027, support pilot communities to develop proposals to seek financial support for infrastructure development, capacity building, and marketing initiatives.	At least 3 proposals developed						

5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

#	Activities	Deliverables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
5.1	Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the social, economic and environmental impacts of the community tourism enterprises, products and activities.	- Baseline assessment report on key indicators - A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework outlining indicators, data collection methods, reporting cycles, and roles/responsibilities - Report on results, challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations						
5.2	By end of assignment, collect feedback from visitors and local communities to continuously improve the tourism products and experiences.	Feedback Report, including summary of structured feedback collected, and analysis of key strengths, gaps and areas for improvement						
5.3	By end of assignment, develop best practice guidance on community tourism development in and around protected areas.	Best Practice Guidance developed						

Skills and Experience

The consultant must have the following skills, education and experience as a minimum:

- Must demonstrate expertise in establishing viable community enterprise models that generate and preserve equitable and inclusive social, cultural and environmental values for local communities.
- Knowledge of the Albanian community tourism landscape, community dynamics and relevant market linkages. Ability to provide training to pilot communities in Albanian language.
- In-depth knowledge of contextual opportunities and constraints within the tourism marketplace, and the capacity to support community tourism enterprises to navigate these effectively.
- Established or demonstrable ability to build trusted relationships with Albanian tourism actors and community tourism networks to strengthen collaboration and foster long-term partnerships.
- Proven ability to establish international community tourism networks and partnerships to mobilise support for community tourism enterprises through capacity building, peer connections and business partnerships.

Contract Value

The estimated contract value is 230,000 USD – 250,000 USD. Financial proposals above 250,000 USD will not be considered.

This consultancy is open to applications from qualified consultancy firms/ organisations only. Individual consultant applications will not be considered.