

THE AZORES NAMED NO. 1 SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION AGAIN



And the Award for Platinum Quality Coast, 2014-2015 goes to the Portuguese archipelago of nine islands - Azores. The award from Quality Coast, the largest certification programme in the world, identifies destinations that stand out in regard to sustainable tourism. This is the first time such an award is being presented.

By achieving the award, Azores has maintained its impressive track record for sustainable tourism destinations. **For 2013-2014, the archipelago was named No.1 sustainable tourism destination by Quality Coast.** Located in the centre of the North Atlantic the Azores achieved high scores in every sector. These included coastal areas, nature, clean water, marine life, hotels, community/identity, landscape, blue flags, environment, culture, and socio-economic factors.

A panel consisting of renowned marine and coastal management specialists was charged with identifying the islands that exhibited the highest standards. Following their unanimous decision, this year the Azores emerged the winner for the second time in two years. It beat a field that consisted of more than 1,000 island and coastal destinations cementing its position at the helm. This is quite impressive considering it became part of the programme in 2009.

The urbanized region in Azores accounts for only 5% of the total land. The main industries in the archipelago are dairy farming, agriculture, fishing, livestock ranching, and tourism. **Concerted efforts are made to ensure renewable energy is adopted.** Success is achieved by emphasizing the importance of protecting the environment. This is done through schooling programs, increasing the protected areas and also better regulation.

Due to the sparse development and urbanization, the volcanic archipelago has many natural heritage sites such as the UNESCO Biosphere reserve. The island is also home to a rich marine eco-system that is also protected. Common animals include pelagic fish, dolphins, marine turtles, sperm whales, great whales, cold water corals and birds. In 2013, UNESCO certified the archipelago as a European Geopark that offers well-regulated snorkeling, cycling trails, scuba-diving, 33 Blue Flag beaches, and hiking.

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