

Responsible tourism itineraries: Santarém step by step - a proposal for a responsible walking tour

PATRÍCIA REIS^{1,2,3} & RUI CARVALHO^{1,3,4}

¹GOVCOPP, University Aveiro; ²CITUR, Instituto Politécnico de Leiria; ³UI&D - Research and Development Unit: ISLA

Santarém; ⁴Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco

Contacting author: patricia.reis@islasantarem.pt

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Objectives | Tourism is crucial for the global economy, contributing significantly to a destination's growth and development. However, the adverse impacts of mass tourism underscore the need for sustainable tourism practices. In this context, responsible tourism has emerged as a vital approach to ensure equitable benefits while preserving a destination's natural and cultural assets the natural and cultural assets of a destination (Cardia, 2018). Responsible tourism itineraries adopt a conscientious approach to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive contributions to the environment, local communities, and cultural heritage (Dayoub, et al., 2020). Planned with sustainability principles, they prioritize the needs of visitors, and the tourism sector, benefitting local communities (Reis & Lavaredas, 2024), and ensuring travelers have meaningful and enriching experiences that leave a positive impact on destinations and people (Brochado et al., 2021). A walking tour can exemplify a responsible tourism itinerary by allowing travellers to immerse themselves in the local culture, minimize their environmental footprint, and support the livelihoods of local guides and artisans while fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the destination's heritage (Fistola & La Rocca, 2018; Le Pira, 2021; UNWTO, 2019). This study aims to develop a responsible tourism itinerary in Santarém, a cultural tourist destination in Portugal, aiming to foster environmental awareness, and local culture preservation, stimulate the local economy, and promote positive interactions between tourists and the local community, with an emphasis on sustainability and socio-environmental responsibility.

Methodology | The study employs a comprehensive methodology, beginning with a literature review contextualizing the concepts of tourist itineraries (Reis & Lavaredas, 2024), sustainable and responsible tourism (Alonso-Muñoz et al., 2023; Cardia, 2018), responsible tourist itineraries (Brochado et al., 2021; Cardia, 2018; Dayoub, et al., 2020; Reis & Lavaredas, 2024), walking tours (Fistola & La Rocca, 2018; Le Pira, 2021; Kaplan & Shiff, 2016; UNWTO, 2019) and cultural itineraries (Dayoub et al., 2020; Fistola & La Rocca, 2018; Palmi et al., 2021; UNWTO, 2015). Then a study of

the territory was carried out to conduct a mapping profile of the local existing cultural resources, a task that was complemented by the analysis of the documented sources required to understand the peculiarities and local traditions of the territory. The proposed walking tour follows a structured 5-phase approach for crafting tourist itineraries: preparation, product design, commercialization, realization, and evaluation (Reis & Lavaredas, 2024). Throughout the development process and to evaluate the responsibility of the walking tour, a comprehensive set of measures will be implemented across three dimensions: environmental, socio-cultural and economic, as suggested by Reis and Lavaredas (2024). In the preparatory phase, local stakeholders, including the community, will be actively engaged. The initiative will be collaboratively tested with these stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that local residents serve as guides throughout the tour implementation. Choosing local guides enriches the tourist experience by offering deep cultural insights, fostering authentic connections with the community, and providing access to unique and lesser-explored resources within the territory (Tauro et al., 2021).

Main Results and Contributions | Responsible walking tours are perceived as an opportunity for sustainable development, fostering synergy between environmental awareness, cultural landscape preservation and social integration, and in that sense, sharing responsibility with visitors becomes a key differentiator, influencing the selection of a product over other market options lacking any degree of responsibility. 'Santarém step by step - a proposal for a walking tour' not only has the potential to stimulate the local economy but also promises tourists an immersive, culturally enriching and sustainable experience. By collaborating with local businesses and engaging local artisans and storytellers, the tour offers a deeper and more authentic understanding of Santarém's culture. From tasting sessions at local bakeries to interactive cultural workshops, the initiative fosters connections between visitors and the community, creating mutual benefits and lasting memories. The critical emphasis on community involvement stands out as a pivotal aspect of this initiative, ensuring local representation and active participation throughout the entire process of establishing a responsible walking tour. The conclusions suggest a replicable model for other tourist destinations and offer valuable insights for stakeholders involved in tourism development, as well as opening a path for the creation of responsible tourist itineraries in the future.

Limitations | The results of the study are specific to a particular region – Santarém, a destination with particular characteristics, including its rich heritage in the historic centre, proximity to cultural resources, winding streets, and the topography conducive to exploration on foot. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these specific characteristics may also impose limitations on generalizing the results to other locations with different contexts. Therefore, other regions may encounter potential resistance from local communities, and logistical challenges that could affect the successful implementation of responsible practices.

Conclusions | This proposal presents a responsible tourism itinerary for Santarém, designed to balance the economic benefits of tourism with environmental awareness, cultural preservation, positive interactions, and a commitment to sustainability. The study has examined the resources available in the region to develop a walking tour offering an opportunity to diversity the tourist experience through responsible practices. Furthermore, the Santarém municipality's investment in diverse thematic itineraries provides a unique backdrop for promoting this proposal. The distinctiveness of the project, particularly as a cultural walking tour, enriches analysis possibilities and provides valuable insights into Santarém's tourism potential. This proposal, involving visits to local places, such as local craftsmanship, with the consumption of traditional products, significantly contributes to local businesses, preserving cultural heritage and contributing to the uniqueness of Santarém as a cultural destination. Moreover, the emphasis on involving local guides creates employment opportunities for residents and community empowerment and it aligns with the principles of responsible tourism, ensuring that the benefits generated from tourism activities contribute meaningfully to the well-being and sustainable growth of Santarém's local community. By embracing responsible tourism principles, Santarém can position itself as a sustainable destination, attracting conscientious travellers who positively contribute to the local community and environment.

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