



Template of Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism

WP2 Deliverable D3.1.1

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INTRODUCTION

This template outlines a set of good practices and criteria for attaining and utilising Dark Sky status as a driver for tourism and economic development. It has been developed as part of the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic project GLOW2.0 (2022–2025), which supports rural communities and enterprises in Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Ireland to grow sustainably through dark skies tourism.

The template provides a practical set of best practices that destinations can adapt when developing tourism linked to night skies cultural and natural heritage.

By integrating these good practices, destinations can create a sustainable dark sky experience that:

- attract visitors during the darker winter months,
- strengthen local economies and create green business opportunities,
- support cultural and natural preservation, and
- raise awareness of the importance of protecting our night skies..

Supporting Information

The template is designed to be adapted flexibly across Northern Periphery and Arctic partner regions, acknowledging different contexts in Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Ireland.

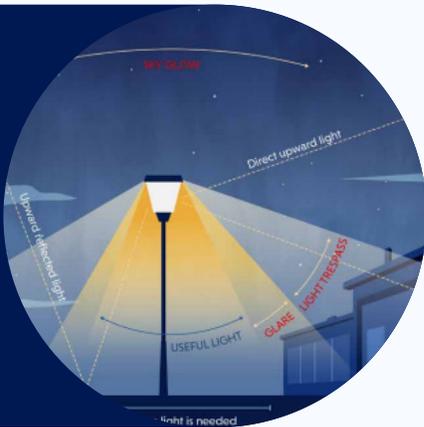
The International Dark Sky Association (IDA) is the leading organization dedicated to preserving dark skies and promoting responsible lighting practices worldwide, while Ruritage specialises in the development of economic strategies based on cultural and natural heritage.



Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism

1. Sky Quality

- Ensure that the location has minimal light pollution and offers exceptional stargazing opportunities. The ([Light Pollution Map](#)) helps illustrate the extent to which combined sources of artificial light impacts darkness in your region.



- To evaluate the sky quality, a night quality survey is essential. There are three ways this can be conducted ([DarkSky International](#)):
 1. Sky Quality Meter Survey
 2. Bortle Scale interpretation
 3. Photographic Evidence

FUN FACT

The lower light pollution goes, the better the view and experiences from darkness such as the aurora borealis, meteors, and the milky way. Without night and darkness, we risk losing the ecological, cultural, scientific, aesthetic, economic and health and wellness values that darkness of nature and dark skies provide. Principles of Responsible Outdoor Lighting ([Link](#))

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism

2. Dark Sky Protection



Orient lights correctly, preferably pointing downwards, and take glare effect into account.

Illuminate only those places where light is really needed, such as walkways.

Use yellow and orange (less than 2700 Kelvin) light sources of suitable intensity combined with a timer or motion sensor whenever possible.

Most importantly: turn off the lights when not in use! After all, you never leave the tap water running when you leave the room.

Interreg  Co-funded by the European Union
Northern Periphery and Arctic

GLOW2.0  Illustrations: Teemu Åke ja Anniina Löytönen 2024

- Implement effective lighting regulations and policies to control light pollution ([Environmentally Friendly Lighting Guide by Dark Sky Ireland](#)).
- Encourage the adoption of dark sky-friendly lighting fixtures and practices in the community by raising awareness ([Efforts and initiatives Guide for Dark Sky areas by GLOW2.0](#)).
- Collaborate with local authorities and stakeholders to enforce light pollution controls if possible ([Tools for local authorities engagement](#)).

Simple ways to reduce light pollution as an individual
[GLOW2.0 Light pollution animation](#)
-[Link to video](#)-

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



3. Visitor Infrastructure

- Develop appropriate infrastructure to support dark sky tourism, such as observation points, viewing platforms, and designated stargazing areas.
- Provide visitor amenities, including restrooms, parking facilities, and information boards or interpretive signage about the night sky.
- Enhance existing services in the area—for example, incorporating night-time experiences into established walking trails. Add interpretive map boards, stargazing information, or simple guides that encourage visitors to enjoy both the landscape and the night sky as part of the same experience.

Newport Sustainable Energy Community Lighting Plan

Newport is the largest urban centre close to Wild Nephin National Park which is home to Ireland's first International Dark Sky Park. Dark Skies project has become particularly important to the community

[-Link to Case Study-](#)

Designing and Implementing Meaningful Lighting of Spaces

[-Link to GLOW2.0 video-](#)

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



4. Educational Programs

- Offer educational opportunities and resources to raise awareness about astronomy, astrophysics, and the importance of dark skies (GLOW2.0 Educational self-study modules).
- Develop educational materials, workshops, and guided tours that cater to different age groups and knowledge levels.
- Collaborate with established organisations such as the National Parks and Wildlife Services or Leave No Trace initiatives, which share common goals in conservation and education. Partnering with existing agencies avoids duplicating efforts, fosters sustainability, and ensures a more effective and resource-efficient approach to outreach.

Self study modules - Light pollution & darkness values

GLOW2.0 offers series of self study modules designed to engage, educate and inspire about fascinating world of darkness, its values and benefits, and its tourism potential. All study modules are freely available and require no registration. -[Link to Modules](#)-

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism

5. Interpretation and Engagement



- Provide displays and exhibits that explain the significance of dark skies.
- Organize events, festivals, and stargazing programs to engage visitors and foster a deeper appreciation for the night sky. e.g. aligning these with International Dark Sky Week .
- Enhance visitor experiences by integrating dark sky content into existing interpretation tools, such as audio trails, apps, or guided storytelling. For example, an audio trail can include stargazing insights and night-sky narratives that complement daytime heritage or nature themes.
- Ensure interpretation materials—signage, audio trails, guides, and digital resources—are available in multiple languages, allowing international visitors to fully engage with and understand the dark sky offering.

(GLOW2.0 video - The Beauty and Benefits of Darkness: [Link](#))

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



6. Collaboration and Partnerships

- Encourage collaboration between local communities, tourism organisations, scientific institutions, and relevant stakeholders.
- Establish partnerships with astronomy clubs, universities, and research centres to enhance the scientific and educational aspects of dark sky tourism e.g., Astronomy club.
- Work with local schools and youth organisations to inspire younger generations and build long-term awareness of the importance of preserving dark skies.
- Partner with national agencies (e.g., National Parks and Wildlife Service, DMOs, or equivalent bodies) to align dark sky initiatives with wider tourism and conservation strategies.
- Build cross-border or international partnerships with other Dark Sky Places to share knowledge, co-host events, and promote joint marketing campaigns.
- Coordinate events around established awareness campaigns such as International Dark Sky Week or Astronomy Week—ideal opportunities to trial new activities, attract media coverage, and strengthen community participation.

Case example

Networking for economic development and conservation

- [Video link to Mayo Dark Sky Festival](#) -

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



7a. Sustainable Practices

Action	Implementation	Supports Sustainable Development Goal
Energy Efficiency & Lighting	<p>-Use energy-efficient lighting such as warm-colour LEDs and full cut-off fixtures to reduce energy waste and light pollution.</p> <p>-Apply smart controls (timers, sensors, adaptive dimming) so lights operate only when needed.</p>	
Resource Management & Circular Economy	<p>-Implement comprehensive waste management, reducing single-use plastics and encouraging reusable materials.</p> <p>-Prioritise local suppliers and materials to support the regional economy and minimise transport emissions.</p>	
Biodiversity & Ecosystem Protection	<p>-Support pollinator-friendly planting and design lighting to protect nocturnal wildlife by minimising light spill.</p>	

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



7b. Sustainable Practices

Action	Implementation	Supports Sustainable Development Goal
Sustainable Mobility	<p>-Use energy-efficient lighting such as warm-colour LEDs and full cut-off fixtures to reduce energy waste and light pollution.</p> <p>-Apply smart controls (timers, sensors, adaptive dimming) so lights operate only when needed.</p>	 
Community & Events	<p>-Implement comprehensive waste management, reducing single-use plastics and encouraging reusable materials.</p> <p>-Prioritise local suppliers and materials to support the regional economy and minimise transport emissions.</p> <p>-Collaborate with other businesses with similar values to provide services.</p>	  

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



8. Marketing and Promotion

- Attract visitors interested in astronomy and stargazing.
- Utilize various channels, including digital platforms, social media, tourism websites, and partnerships with travel agencies, to promote the dark sky experience.
- Provide toolbox kits for local businesses and SMEs, including basic stargazing information, binoculars, red torches, and quick-reference guides on night-sky highlights.
- Offer training workshops for businesses on how to market stargazing events, package experiences with food/ accommodation, and tell compelling dark-sky stories.
- Create ready-to-use promotional content (e.g., photos, videos, logos, event templates) that businesses can adapt and share, ensuring consistent branding across the destination.
- Highlight seasonal and celestial events (meteor showers, eclipses, solstices) in marketing campaigns to drive repeat visitation and off-peak tourism.
- Encourage co-marketing campaigns between tourism boards, astronomy clubs, and local enterprises to increase visibility and share costs.
- Develop multilingual promotional materials to reach international visitors.
- Use visitor feedback and testimonials as storytelling material for campaigns, reinforcing the authenticity and emotional value of dark-sky experiences.
- Promote the sustainability and conservation message—positioning dark-sky tourism as both a unique visitor experience and a contribution to climate action and biodiversity protection.

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism

9. Socioeconomic Benefits



- Assess and communicate potential economic benefits of dark sky tourism to the local community, job creation, revenue generation, and business opportunities. Use of case studies can be beneficial.
- Encourage the involvement of local businesses, accommodations, restaurants, and other service providers in catering to dark sky tourists. Ensure they are included in training and support them on their journey.
- Encourage seasonal diversification, showing businesses how dark sky activities can extend the tourism season into the darker months, reducing dependence on summer season.
- Create opportunities for youth employment and skills development in areas such as guiding, interpretation, and digital storytelling connected to dark skies. While primarily seasonal, these roles can add an extra layer of sustainability by complementing existing tourism offers and extending the season.
- Support local accommodation providers, craft, food, and cultural products by linking them with night-sky experiences (e.g., stargazing with local food tastings, astronomy events with artisan markets).
- Reinforce the multiplier effect—how dark sky tourism benefits ripple through the wider local economy (transport, retail, creative industries), not just core tourism services.

Economic Impacts of Dark Sky Tourism - Case Northumberland , UK

The study analyses the economic impact of the value of dark skies to tourism in and around an International Dark Sky Park ([Link to Case Study](#)).

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



10. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Establish a system to monitor the impact of dark sky tourism on the local economy, environment, and community.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of dark sky strategies and initiatives to identify areas for improvement and ensure long-term sustainability.
- Align monitoring with DarkSky International standards, ensuring compliance with lighting policies, audits, and conservation requirements so status and reputation are maintained.
- Use visitor feedback tools (surveys, digital reviews, social media monitoring) to capture the quality of visitor experiences and adjust offers accordingly.
- Report results annually to local stakeholders, funders, and communities, linking them to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to demonstrate wider impact.

Case example of conservation efforts in Ireland

Community Foundation Ireland

-Link to video-

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



11a. Pre-application considerations for Dark Sky status

When developing dark sky strategies, it is important to consider the wider international context in which they will be applied.

External factors such as environmental conservation, tourism development, and economic sustainability all influence opportunities and challenges.

Reviewing national or regional strategic plans can also help align local initiatives with broader policy frameworks—for example, Ireland’s Dark Sky Strategic Plan 2023–2027 provides a useful reference model. ([link](#)).

In addition, communities aiming for official recognition must understand the formal DarkSky International application process, which is detailed in the following tables. This process outlines the criteria, review stages, and long-term commitments required to achieve and maintain Dark Sky Place status.

Environmental	Tourism Logistics	Economic Development
<p>Suitability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Assess the natural conditions of the area, such as sky quality, weather patterns, and astronomical features.Determine if the location has the potential to offer a unique and compelling stargazing experience.	<p>Collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Build partnerships with local communities, tourism stakeholders, and astronomers to create a cohesive and inclusive dark sky tourism experience.	<p>Market Potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Conduct market research to identify target audiences interested in dark sky tourism.Develop marketing and promotional strategies to attract tourists and maximize economic benefits.

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



11b. Pre-application considerations for Dark Sky status

Environmental	Tourism Logistics	Economic Development
<p>Biodiversity Preservation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the dark sky strategy promotes the conservation of local flora and fauna. • Encourage measures to minimize light pollution’s impact on biodiversity. 	<p>Infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the dark sky strategy promotes the conservation of local flora and fauna. • Encourage measures to minimize light pollution’s impact on biodiversity. 	<p>Local Community Involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the local community in the development and management of dark sky tourism initiatives. • Encourage entrepreneurship and local businesses to capitalize on dark sky tourism opportunities.
<p>Green Initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate sustainable practices in lighting infrastructure, energy usage, and waste management. • Promote eco-friendly transportation options for tourists visiting dark sky areas. 	<p>Visitor Experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide informative and engaging experiences, including guided tours, educational programs, and astronomy-related events. • Offer opportunities for hands-on stargazing and astrophotography. 	<p>Cultural Heritage Integration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the cultural significance of the night sky in the local community’s traditions, folklore, and indigenous knowledge. • Incorporate cultural events, storytelling, and artistic expressions related to astronomy and the night sky.

International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) – Updated Application Process



12a. Pre-application considerations for Dark Sky status

Applying for Dark Sky Place status can take 1–3 years depending on the type of designation (Community, Park, Reserve, Sanctuary, or Urban Night Sky Place), local conditions, and the scale of improvements needed. The process requires long-term community engagement, lighting policy implementation, and sky quality monitoring.

Application Steps			
Step	Phase	Key Activities	Timeline
1	Early Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure eligibility check light pollution level meet minimum requirements for light pollution to ease the process of application • Connect with local community and Dark Sky organisation • Build core working group (residents, local authorities, businesses, schools, tourism partners) • Identify appropriate designation type 	Initial phase
2	Draft Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data (sky quality measurements, lighting audits, maps) • Develop lighting management plans • Create community outreach programmes • Prepare draft application in digital, text-searchable format (no scanned PDFs) 	Ongoing preparation

International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) – Updated Application Process



12b. Pre-application considerations for Dark Sky status

Application Steps			
Step	Phase	Key Activities	Timeline
3	Pre-submission Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notify DarkSky International staff before submitting final draft Application placed into review cycle 	At least 45 days before submission
4	Staff Review & Revisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit draft application Receive feedback from DarkSky staff Complete multiple rounds of revisions and clarifications 	Multiple iterations expected
5	Committee Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application forwarded to Dark Sky Places Committee assesses compliance with criteria 	90–150 days
6	Decision & Certification	<p>Possible outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full endorsement (certified as Dark Sky Place) Conditional endorsement (revisions required) Rejection (with improvement feedback) <p><i>If approved: formal certification and addition to international network</i></p>	Final decision phase
7	Ongoing Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit annual reports documenting compliance, community engagement, and lighting policy progress Maintain certification standards 	Post-certification requirement

Good Practices for Dark Skies Tourism



13. Conclusions

Dark sky tourism presents a unique opportunity for rural regions across the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) to unite environmental conservation with sustainable economic growth. By implementing the good practices outlined in this template, communities and enterprises (SMEs) can develop authentic, year-round visitor experiences that protect natural and cultural heritage while driving local innovation.

Safeguarding sky quality, adopting responsible lighting, and embedding sustainability principles are essential foundations for success. Equally, education, community participation, and strong partnerships ensure that dark sky tourism remains both inclusive and resilient.

While achieving recognition through DarkSky International certification is one possible outcome, the broader value lies in how these practices can be adapted across regions—from Ireland to Iceland, Norway, and Finland—to strengthen biodiversity protection, enhance visitor well-being, and contribute directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

By positioning dark sky tourism within wider regional and national strategies, GLOW 2.0 partner regions can become European leaders in sustainable innovation—offering transformative experiences under truly dark skies while ensuring long-term benefits for people, nature, and the planet.

FURTHER INFORMATION

GLOW2.0 - Green Energy Technologies for Tourism Project has been funded by Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme.

Link to project website: [NPA GLOW2.0](#)

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