



Balkan Pearls Sustainability Results Report 2024–2026

Responsible travel across Albania and the Balkans

Reporting period: 2024–2026

Recognition: SDG Business Pioneers Award Albania 2025 – Small Business Category Winner

Sustainability status: Travelife Partner, valid 08 August 2024 – 08 August 2026

Main SDGs addressed: SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 17

Our sustainability commitment

Balkan Pearls is a woman-founded and woman-led inbound travel company based in Tirana, Albania. We design tailor-made journeys across Albania and the Balkans, combining cultural heritage, nature, gastronomy, adventure, MICE travel, and community-based experiences.

Sustainability is part of how we plan, sell, and operate travel. Our aim is to create meaningful tourism experiences that benefit local communities, protect natural and cultural heritage, reduce environmental impact, and promote fair and inclusive economic opportunities.

During the 2024–2026 reporting cycle, Balkan Pearls continued to implement its sustainability policy through the Travelife framework. Our approach covers responsible operations, fair employment, local supply chains, environmental management, traveller information, child protection, community value, and ethical business conduct.

Our sustainability work is guided by three pillars:

People: empowering women, youth, employees, guides, hosts, artisans, and local communities.

Planet: reducing waste, energy use, water use, and transport-related emissions while protecting

natural and cultural resources.

Prosperity: keeping tourism value in local economies through fair partnerships, local procurement, innovation, and year-round tourism development.

Company profile

Balkan Pearls was founded by Silvana and Vilma, two experienced tourism professionals with a shared vision for authentic, responsible, and community-based travel across the Balkans.

The company works with individual travellers, groups, tour operators, corporate clients, and partner agencies. Our products include cultural routes, multi-country Balkan tours, gastronomy experiences, adventure travel, guaranteed departures, MICE services, and special-interest journeys.

We work closely with locally owned accommodations, certified guides, family-run restaurants, artisans, drivers, rural households, and community groups. As a destination management company, we have the opportunity and responsibility to influence the tourism value chain and promote responsible choices among partners and travellers.

Key sustainability results 2024–2026

Governance, transparency, and Travelife implementation

Balkan Pearls strengthened its sustainability management system during this reporting cycle and continued to align its operations with Travelife requirements.

Key results

- Achieved Travelife Partner status on 08 August 2024, valid until 08 August 2026.
- Published and implemented a sustainability policy covering legal compliance, human resources, human rights, children's rights, environmental management, supplier expectations, responsible excursions, and traveller information.
- Committed to publicly communicating sustainability performance at least every two years.
- Assigned internal responsibility for sustainability coordination, policy implementation, supplier communication, and improvement actions.
- Integrated sustainability principles into staff meetings, training, product design, supplier selection, and traveller communication.
- Continued using the Travelife platform as a tool for sustainability monitoring, learning, and improvement.



- Applied a zero-tolerance approach to corruption, discrimination, forced labour, exploitation, harassment, and violations of children's rights.

Balkan Pearls is now working to move from policy implementation toward stronger measurement, including more structured monitoring of visitor impact, supplier practices, waste reduction, and estimated emissions per passenger.

People: social impact

People are at the centre of Balkan Pearls' sustainability work. We believe responsible tourism should create real opportunities for employees, guides, hosts, artisans, rural households, women, and young professionals.

Women's leadership and inclusive employment

Balkan Pearls actively promotes gender equality and inclusive employment within Albania's tourism sector.

Key results

- 90% of the Balkan Pearls team are women.
- Both company founders are women.
- 80% of staff are young professionals aged 20–35.
- 100% of office staff are local.
- Employees have written contracts, defined roles, and access to state health and social insurance.
- Salaries are maintained above the national minimum wage, based on role and responsibility.
- Flexible work arrangements support work-life balance.
- Employee wellbeing is supported through regular communication, team meetings, and feedback.

Decent work and professional development

Balkan Pearls supports fair employment, safe working conditions, employee wellbeing, and continuous learning.

Key results

- 100% of staff participate in annual sustainability, customer service, and health and safety training.
- Staff have access to Travelife learning resources and internal sustainability awareness sessions.
- Guides receive pre-season briefings on responsible tourism, guest safety, cultural sensitivity, and environmental protection.
- Employee feedback is collected and used to improve internal communication and team wellbeing.
- Balkan Pearls collaborates with the Faculty of Foreign Languages to provide internship opportunities.
- Three university interns have completed professional training with Balkan Pearls, with some moving into employment opportunities.

Women-centered tourism experiences

With support from UN Women Albania, Balkan Pearls developed a women-centered tourism experience that creates opportunities for local women to act as hosts, guides, storytellers, and small business owners.

Key results

- More than 15 women have been engaged through women-led tourism experiences.
- The initiative promotes authentic cultural exchange for women, mothers, children, and families.
- The product supports local income generation while strengthening the visibility of women as leaders in tourism.
- Balkan Pearls continues to promote women-led guiding, hosting, handicrafts, food experiences, and rural community tourism.

Community benefit

Balkan Pearls designs experiences that help tourism income reach local families and small businesses.

Key results

- Collaboration with more than 30 local suppliers and community partners.
- Regular cooperation with family-run guesthouses, restaurants, guides, drivers, artisans, musicians, and rural hosts.



- Income opportunities for more than 50 individuals annually through tourism-related partnerships.
- Support for women-led and family-run businesses across Albania and the Balkans.
- Priority given to local guides and service providers who understand and respect local culture, nature, and communities.

Planet: environmental impact

Balkan Pearls is committed to reducing its environmental footprint and encouraging travellers and partners to make responsible choices.

Energy and office resource reduction

Although Balkan Pearls has a small office footprint, we continue to reduce energy use and promote efficient operations.

Key results

- Office lighting has been replaced with LED lighting.
- Energy-efficient office equipment and eco-mode settings are prioritized.
- “Switch-off” procedures are used for lights, computers, and electronics.
- Internal meetings and partner communication are increasingly conducted online to reduce unnecessary travel.
- Electricity use has been reduced by an estimated 35% through efficiency measures and staff awareness.

Water efficiency

Our direct water use is limited, but we apply water-saving practices in the office and promote water awareness during tours.

Key results

- Dual-flush toilets and regular maintenance help prevent unnecessary water use.

- Staff awareness actions have contributed to an estimated 15% annual reduction in office water consumption.
- Travellers are encouraged to avoid water waste, especially in rural areas and during summer months.

Waste and plastic reduction

Waste reduction is one of our most visible operational priorities.

Key results

- Single-use plastic use has been reduced by approximately 80%.
- Disposable cups, bottles, and packaging have been replaced wherever possible with reusable alternatives.
- Digital documentation has reduced paper use by more than 70%.
- Toner cartridges, batteries, and paper are recycled through authorized collection points where available.
- Staff follow a reduce–reuse–recycle approach in daily operations.
- Travellers are encouraged to use refillable bottles and avoid single-use items during tours.
- Balkan Pearls estimates that more than 250 kg of waste is avoided annually through reduced printing, reusable products, and improved office practices.

Transport and carbon reduction

Transport is one of the main environmental impacts of tourism. Balkan Pearls works to reduce transport-related emissions by planning efficient routes and using appropriate vehicles.

Key results

- Cooperation with transport partners that apply safe, responsible, and fuel-efficient operations.
- Priority given to group and optimized transfers to reduce emissions per passenger.
- Itineraries are designed to avoid unnecessary backtracking and reduce fuel use.
- Domestic and short-haul flights are avoided where reasonable alternatives exist.
- Selected itineraries show an estimated 20–25% reduction in emissions per passenger through group travel, route optimization, and appropriate vehicle size.
- Guides and drivers are briefed on responsible behaviour, waste handling, and guest safety.

Carbon figures are management estimates and will be strengthened through improved measurement in the next reporting cycle.

Nature, cultural heritage, and ecosystem protection



Balkan Pearls designs experiences that respect carrying capacity, local rules, cultural values, and fragile ecosystems.

Key results

- Tours are designed to reduce pressure on overcrowded destinations by promoting off-season travel, small groups, and lesser-known areas.
- Guides brief travellers on responsible behaviour at natural sites, national parks, UNESCO heritage areas, rural villages, and protected landscapes.
- Responsible visits are promoted in cultural heritage destinations such as Berat, Gjirokastër, Butrint, Ohrid, and Kotor.
- Activities that harm wildlife, communities, natural resources, or cultural integrity are not supported.
- At sensitive natural sites, guides remind travellers not to litter, disturb wildlife, damage vegetation, or ignore local protection rules.
- Traditional crafts, music, food culture, and storytelling are included in itineraries as part of cultural preservation.

Prosperity: economic impact

Balkan Pearls supports local economic resilience by keeping tourism value in Albania and the wider Balkan region.

Local suppliers and fair value chains

Our business model depends on strong and fair local partnerships.

Key results

- More than 30 locally owned or locally managed suppliers are engaged in Balkan Pearls operations.
- Partners include guides, drivers, guesthouses, restaurants, artisans, agrotourism families, musicians, handicraft workshops, and small shops.
- Family-run and community-based businesses are prioritized wherever possible.

- An estimated 15–20% of trip expenditure goes directly to small, family-run enterprises through meals, activities, guiding, transport, accommodation, and local purchases.
- More than 20 households benefit directly from recurring tourism collaboration.
- More than 50 individuals receive annual income opportunities through Balkan Pearls partnerships.

Examples of local economic impact

Balkan Pearls supports local livelihoods through practical partnerships, including:

- Home-cooked meals and tastings with local families in Gjirokaštër and Berat.
- Cooperation with polyphonic music groups in Gjirokaštër to help preserve intangible heritage.
- Collaboration with pottery makers, handicraft producers, and local artisans.
- Nature-based experiences with an agrotourism family in Shëngjergj.
- Support for a women's handicraft workshop in Elbasan that provides employment opportunities for survivors of abuse and promotes social inclusion.
- Responsible souvenir purchasing from small shops and artisans in Krujë and Tirana.
- Engagement of certified local guides who interpret history, culture, nature, and responsible visitor behaviour.

Innovation and digital transformation

Digital tools help Balkan Pearls improve service quality, reduce paperwork, and strengthen operational efficiency.

Key results

- Online reservation and booking systems have reduced manual administration.
- Digital communication and payment tools improve coordination with suppliers and clients.
- Cloud-based systems are used for document sharing and data storage.
- Paper use has been reduced by more than 70% through digital documentation.
- Balkan Pearls is developing a stronger digital database for local partners and certified guides to improve service tracking, transparency, and sustainability monitoring.
- The company is exploring AI-supported tools for itinerary customization, reporting, and internal efficiency.

Partnerships and off-season tourism

Balkan Pearls works with partners to strengthen community-based tourism and support year-round income.

Key results



- Cooperation with local tourism boards, municipalities, community partners, and international organizations.
- Support for Planeterra's field assessment and development planning for community tourism in Gjirokastër villages.
- Planned community experiences aim to create new opportunities for local women, youth, and rural families.
- Off-season travel from October to April is promoted to reduce pressure on peak destinations and spread income more evenly throughout the year.
- Balkan Pearls shares knowledge and best practices with partners to improve destination management and responsible tourism standards.

SDG alignment

Balkan Pearls contributes most directly to the following Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG	Contribution
SDG 5 – Gender Equality	Women's leadership, women-led tourism experiences, and support for women guides, hosts, artisans, and small businesses.
SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	Fair employment, written contracts, local jobs, internships, guide training, and income generation for local suppliers.
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities	Support for women, youth, rural communities, local hosts, and inclusive tourism initiatives.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities Promotion of cultural heritage, local traditions, responsible visitor behaviour, and community-based experiences.

SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production Waste reduction, reduced paper use, local procurement, reusable alternatives, and responsible supplier expectations.

SDG 13 – Climate Action Energy efficiency, optimized transport, reduced travel emissions, digital operations, and staff/traveller awareness.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals Collaboration with Travelife, UN Women Albania, Planeterra, local communities, tourism boards, suppliers, and development partners.

Recognition: SDG Business Pioneers Award Albania 2025

In 2025, Balkan Pearls Tour Operator sh.p.k. was recognized as the Small Business Category Winner at the SDG Business Pioneers Award Albania, under the sustainable tourism focus.

This recognition reflects our commitment to green tourism, women's leadership, community empowerment, local suppliers, responsible experiences, and measurable progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

For Balkan Pearls, the award is not an endpoint. It is a responsibility to continue improving, measuring, and sharing our sustainability performance with travellers, partners, communities, and the public.

Data quality and measurement note

This report presents the key sustainability results achieved and monitored by Balkan Pearls during the 2024–2026 Travelife cycle.



The figures included in this report are based on internal records, supplier lists, staff information, training records, operational monitoring, and management estimates. Some indicators, especially carbon, waste, and local expenditure figures, are estimates and will be improved through stronger measurement systems in the next reporting cycle.

Balkan Pearls is committed to improving the accuracy of sustainability data by strengthening:

- supplier sustainability checks;
- visitor impact monitoring;
- waste and resource-use tracking;
- transport emission estimates;
- community benefit reporting;
- staff and guide training records.

Priorities for 2026 and beyond

To continue improving sustainability performance, Balkan Pearls will focus on the following priorities:

1. Strengthen visitor impact monitoring at sensitive natural and cultural sites.
2. Improve supplier sustainability screening and documentation.
3. Increase the number of women-led and youth-led community tourism experiences.
4. Expand off-season tourism products to support year-round local income.
5. Improve measurement of waste reduction, water use, electricity use, and transport emissions.
6. Increase traveller education on waste reduction, responsible purchasing, cultural respect, and local environmental rules.
7. Continue progress from Travelife Partner status toward stronger sustainability verification.
8. Publish sustainability results at least every two years.

Our 2026 promise

By 2026, we pledge to create greater opportunities for women and youth in tourism, empowering rural communities through fair employment and sustainable growth, and helping Albania move toward a more sustainable tourism future.

Balkan Pearls welcomes questions from travellers, partners, suppliers, and communities about our sustainability practices, local partnerships, and responsible travel approach.