

# Environmentally friendly visitation to Sečovlje Salina Nature Park

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Mediterranean Salinas are national areas of exceptional cultural, economic and aesthetic values, where biodiversity can be regulated and maintained. Active salt pans are a good example of cohabitation between economic activity, tourism and conservation needs. And it is perhaps this very fact that keeps them alive, given that economic aspirations are more than negligible in these areas.

Protected areas offer their visitors several natural and other qualities and are, at the same time, increasingly co-created by tourism and recreation. Most of them have acquired their protection status owing to their well-preserved natural environment and presence of exceptional natural and cultural assets. They are distinguished by cohabitation of different land use types, which are characterized by occasionally conflicting interests that are not always in unison with each other.

One of the commonest activities is visiting of the pans, which is already traditional in protected areas and a significant prospect for future development. Visiting of the pans, however, is not significant only from the economic and educational aspects, but also draws attention to the significant recreational role of protected areas, which provide high quality spending of spare time for the locals as well as for the visitors coming from predominantly urban areas.

The Sečovlje Salina Nature Park is a national territory of high natural, cultural, economic and aesthetic values, the biodiversity of which can be maintained and regulated through sustainable management. The visitors in Sečovlje Salina Nature Park are invited to experience the Park through various forms of guidance (information centres and points, information boards, trails, mobile applications), guided tours, workshops in nature, creative workshops and different education programs and lectures. Most suitable forms of recreation are those subjected to the Park's basic purposes. Our guests are recommended to visit the park on foot. To them, the park boards are intended, whereas from June 2016 onwards the Nexto mobile application, which enables an individual guided tour of the park, will also be available to them. The mobile guide is a good technological solution, as it helps us to conserve nature and cultural heritage without invasively encroaching upon it. The higher the number of the mobile application users visiting the natural features, the lower the number of information boards in the Park, which are unnecessary and often spoil the environment.

Monitoring of the Park's visitors has been introduced in Sečovlje Salina Nature Park and a study on environmentally friendly transport carried out in the Park, when attempting to check the reasonableness and usefulness of electric vehicles for transportation by the Park's visitors.

The carrying capacity was estimated on the basis of the carrying capacity indicators for the sustainable visitation scenario. They were selected based on subjective judgment regarding the specific features of the area under consideration.



*Figure 1. Aerial view of the wooden trail in the Fontanigge area within Sečovlje Salina Nature Park (Photo: I. Škornik)*

In 2015, we started to construct visitor infrastructure to become the first Slovenian managed nature park with no motorized access for visitors. For this reason, 2 new wooden trails have been placed parallel to the roads which are reserved for electric vehicles and bicycles and constitute the only access, but distant enough to reduce noises to the minimum. The itineraries have been placed over the water and provided with a wooden fence. A small electric vehicle and bicycles are available for those who are not able or do not wish to walk and a tourist electric “train” will soon be introduced to transport tourists to the Museum of Salt-making.

The main objective of Sečovlje Salina Nature Park is a more respectful use of the environment, to enable the visitors to discover the beauty of these places and to enjoy every single detail without outside interference.

Our long-term objectives of the Park’s management are directed towards protection and sustained conservation of natural beauties and thus biodiversity of Sečovlje Salina, as well as towards protection of cultural heritage and the characteristics of littoral cultural landscape of Slovenian Istria.

In accordance with the biodiversity conservation strategy in Slovenia, “tourism” can pose a development opportunity for the areas with high natural assets, although only under the condition that it does not diminish biodiversity, reduces utilization of non-renewable sources and follows the principles of sustainable visitation, which has to include preservation of diversity, characteristics and beauties of nature and landscape. Sustainable visitation of protected areas should be understood as an opportunity and not as pressure or threat.