



INSTO

International Network
of Sustainable Tourism
Observatories

2025 EDITION

ANNUAL REPORT | INSTO

2024 INDICATORS

O.T.S.A. | AZORES SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OBSERVATORY

TECHNICAL FRAMEWORK

The present 2025 Annual Report of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO), submitted by the Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory (OTSA), presents the analysis of the main indicators defined by this international network, with a particular focus on the results for 2024 and their evolution over recent years.

This document contributes to the continuous monitoring of tourism activity in the Autonomous Region of the Azores, enabling a systematic assessment of the sector's dynamics and its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts, in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism.

The information presented herein results from a rigorous process of data collection, analysis, and systematization, based on multiple sources: surveys conducted by OTSA, statistics from the Azores Regional Statistics Service (SREA), national data from Turismo de Portugal, and contributions from other regional entities relevant to monitoring tourism activity.

With this report, OTSA reaffirms its commitment to producing independent and credible technical-scientific knowledge, serving Azorean society and public decision-makers, and supporting sustainable tourism development strategies for the Region.

THE AUTONOMOUS REGION OF THE AZORES

The Azores constitute an Autonomous Region of the Portuguese Republic, composed of nine islands of volcanic origin, located in the North Atlantic. The region stands out for its geostrategic relevance, the diversity of its terrestrial and marine ecosystems, the richness of its cultural and historical heritage, and its commitment to environmental preservation—factors that underpin its distinct identity at both the national and international levels.

EARTHCHECK THE AZORES AS A TOURISM DESTINATION: GOLD-CERTIFIED DESTINATION – EARTHCHECK

As a tourism destination, the Azores stand out for the diversity of experiences related to nature tourism, wellness, and culture, offering an authentic experience supported by the valorization of local resources.

THE ROLE OF THE AZORES SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OBSERVATORY

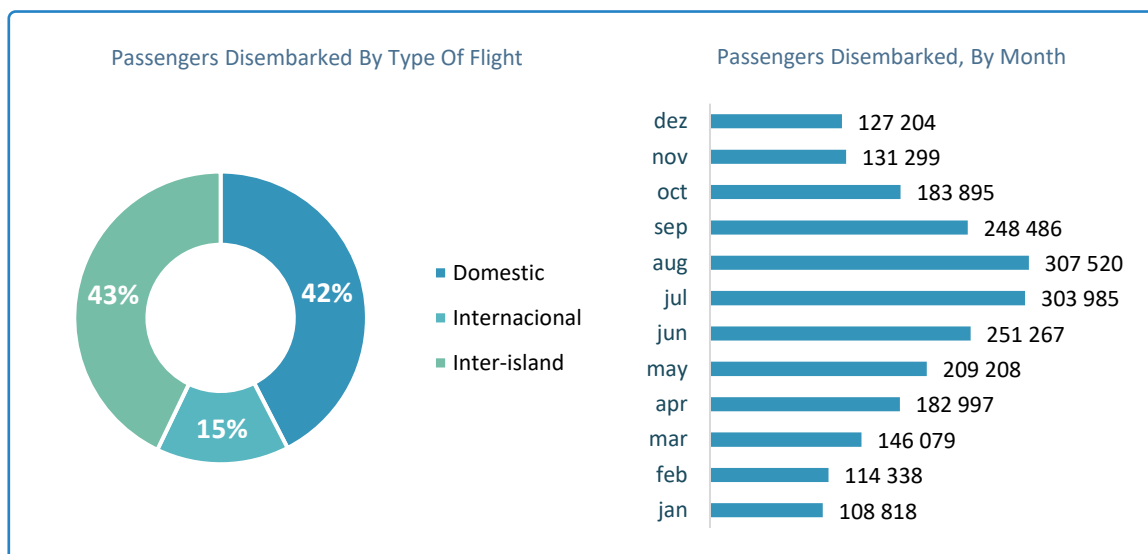
The Azores Tourism Observatory (OTSA) plays a central role in monitoring tourism activity, collecting and analyzing information on both supply and demand across the islands. Its work includes satisfaction surveys of tourists and residents, as well as the assessment of sustainable and digital practices of businesses—key factors for the sector's competitiveness and adaptability. In 2020, OTSA joined the international network INSTO – International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories, reinforcing its commitment to the production of independent knowledge and to the promotion of public policies and private strategies based on sustainability.

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1. SAZONALITY

1.1. AIR PASSENGERS ARRIVING, BY MONTH AND ISLAND, 2024



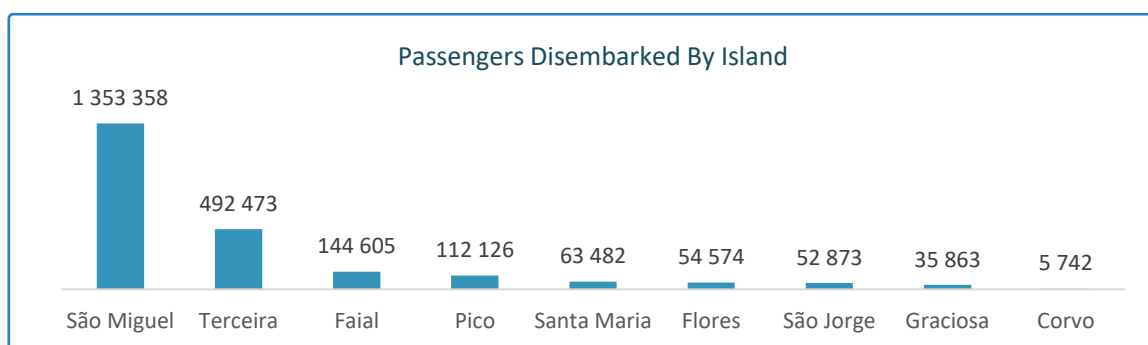
Data source: Azores Regional Statistics Service; Charts prepared by the authors

In 2024, 2,315,096 passengers arrived in the Azores, distributed among domestic/regional flights (982,363; 42%), international flights (340,028; 15%), and inter-island flights (992,705; 43%).

The monthly evolution shows a clear pattern of tourism seasonality. Between January and March, passenger numbers were low, ranging from 108,000 to 146,000, corresponding to about 5% to 6% of the annual total in each month. From April onwards, demand gradually increased, reaching 182,997 passengers (8% of the annual total) and exceeding 209,208 (9%) in May.

The peak occurs in summer: June recorded 251,267 passengers (11%), July 303,985 (13%), and August 307,520 (13%), with the latter being the busiest month. July and August alone accounted for around 26% of the annual total, confirming a strong dependence on the high season.

September remained at high levels, with 248,486 passengers (11% of the annual total), but from October onwards demand dropped to lower levels: 183,895 (8%) in October, 131,299 (6%) in November, and 127,204 (5%) in December.

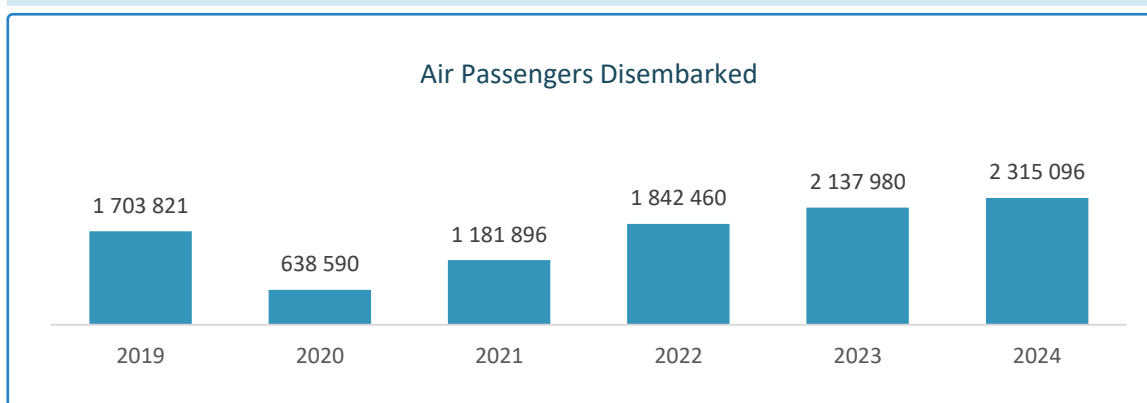


Source of data: Azores Regional Statistics Service; Charts: own elaboration.

The analysis by island also reveals a strong spatial concentration. São Miguel received 1,353,358 passengers, corresponding to approximately 58% of the regional total. Terceira ranks second with 492,473 passengers (21%), while Faial (6%) and Pico (5%) show intermediate values. The remaining five islands together account for only about 10% of the total, with Santa Maria (3%) and Flores (2%) standing out. Corvo recorded just 0.2%, reflecting its role as a highly specialized destination.

In summary, the data confirm two key characteristics of tourism in the Azores: strong temporal seasonality, concentrated between June and September (a period accounting for about 47% of annual traffic), and high spatial concentration, dominated by São Miguel and Terceira, which together absorb nearly 80% of total passenger arrivals.

1.2. EVOLUTION OF AIR PASSENGERS DISEMBARKED, 2019–2024



Source of data: Azores Regional Statistics Service; Charts: own elaboration.

In 2019, a total of 1,703,821 passengers disembarked in the Azores, establishing a pre-pandemic benchmark. In the following year, 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis were particularly evident: the number of passengers dropped sharply to 638,590, representing a decrease of -63% compared to the previous year. This figure reflects the direct impact of mobility restrictions and the near standstill of international tourism.

In 2021, a recovery process began, with 1,181,896 disembarkations, corresponding to a significant growth of +85% compared to 2020. Despite this strong rebound, the figure had not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. The real leap occurred in 2022, when the number of disembarked passengers rose to 1,842,460, an increase of +56% compared to the previous year, surpassing 2019 levels for the first time.

The growth trend consolidated in 2023, with 2,137,980 disembarkations, representing an annual increase of +16%. Finally, in 2024, the highest value in the entire series was recorded: 2,315,096 passengers, an additional +8% compared to 2023. This result confirms not only the full recovery of post-pandemic tourism activity but also its expansion to historic levels, with an absolute increase of more than 600 thousand passengers compared to 2019.

1.3. EVOLUTION OF AIR PASSENGERS DISEMBARKED, 2021–2024



Source: Own elaboration.

The monthly analysis of disembarked passengers between 2021 and 2024 confirms the strong seasonality of tourism in the Azores. Traffic increases gradually from spring onwards, peaks in July and August—with values exceeding 300 thousand passengers in 2024—and declines sharply from September. In contrast, the winter months—January, February, November, and December—consistently record the lowest figures, ranging between 100 thousand and 130 thousand passengers.

Despite the continuous growth following the pandemic, the overall structure remains unchanged: nearly half of the annual total is concentrated between June and September, while winter continues to be marked by low demand, highlighting the structural challenge of seasonality in the Azores destination.

1.4. TOURIST ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS IN OPERATION

Tourist Accommodation Establishments In Operation In The Azores, By Month, 2024



Source: Azores Regional Statistics Service

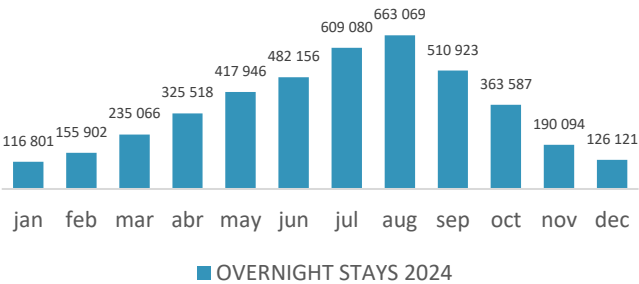
The chart shows that throughout 2024, the number of tourist accommodation establishments in operation in the Azores remained high and relatively stable, with a clear predominance of local accommodation over hotels. In every month of the year, local accommodation represents the largest share of supply, largely exceeding three thousand units in operation, while the number of hotels remains significantly lower, ranging approximately between 96 and 126 establishments.

A slight seasonality in supply is also observed, particularly in local accommodation, with a gradual increase in the number of units in operation from spring onwards, reaching peak levels during the summer months (July to September), coinciding with the high tourism season. During the winter months, a moderate decrease is recorded, reflecting the adjustment of supply to lower tourist demand.

In the case of hotels, variation throughout the year is less pronounced, suggesting greater operational stability for this type of accommodation, regardless of seasonality. This pattern reinforces the importance of local accommodation as a flexible component of the tourism supply, capable of responding quickly to demand fluctuations, while also highlighting the need for continuous monitoring in the context of destination sustainability and the balance between supply, demand, and territorial impacts.

1.5 NUMBER OF OVERNIGHT STAYS AND EVOLUTION

Year	Total Overnight Stays (Azores)	Growth Rate
2024	4,196 263	+12,6%
2023	3,727 399	+15,0%
2022	3,242 060	+67,7%
2021	1,932 717	+123,1%
2020	866 221	-71,3%
2019	3,021 347	—



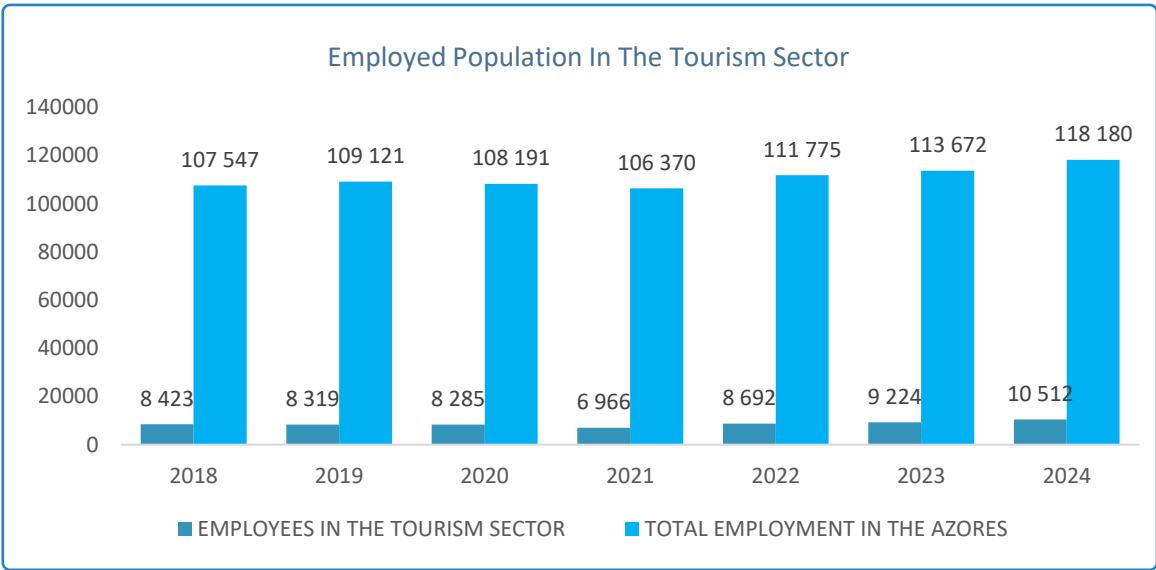
Source: Azores Regional Statistics Service; overnight stays in all types of accommodation.

In 2024, the Azores recorded 4,196,263 overnight stays, the highest value in the series under analysis, corresponding to a growth of 12.6% compared to 2023. Since 2019, the trend shows a sharp decline in 2020 (-71.3%) due to the impact of the pandemic, followed by a very strong recovery in 2021 (+123.1%) and 2022 (+67.7%). In more recent years, the upward trend has continued, albeit with more moderate growth rates, signaling a transition into a consolidation phase following the strong rebound.

The monthly analysis for 2024 highlights pronounced seasonality, particularly in July (609 thousand overnight stays) and August (663 thousand), which together account for nearly 30% of the annual total. September (510 thousand) and October (364 thousand) extend the high season, although already with a significant decline. The winter months—January, February, November, and December—show residual figures, all below 200 thousand overnight stays, confirming the persistence of the low-season challenge in the destination.

2. EMPLOYMENT

2.1. EMPLOYED POPULATION IN THE TOURISM SECTOR, AZORES



Source: Azores Regional Statistics Service | Labour Market

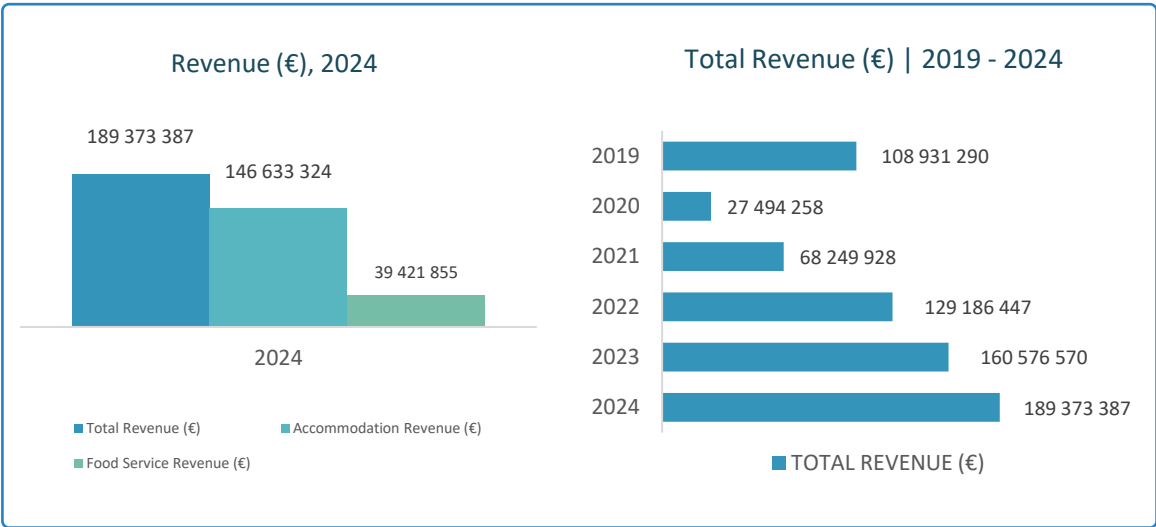
Between 2018 and 2024, the accommodation, food service, and similar activities sector in the Azores showed a trajectory marked by cyclical fluctuations, but also by a clear growth trend in the most recent period. In 2018, the sector employed 8,423 workers, representing 7.83% of total regional employment. This figure remained relatively stable in 2019 (8,319; 7.62%) and in 2020 (8,285; 7.66%), despite the initial impact of the pandemic.

The year 2021 reflected the most critical moment for the sector, with a decline to 6,966 workers, equivalent to 6.55% of total employment, in line with the contraction in tourism activity caused by mobility restrictions. However, from 2022 onwards, a consistent recovery is observed: employment rose to 8,692 (7.78%), further increasing in 2023 to 9,224 (8.11%), and reaching in 2024 the highest value in the series, 10,512 workers, representing 8.89% of total regional employment.

This recent growth highlights the increasing weight of the tourism sector in the Azorean labour market, not only in absolute terms but also as a share of total employment. Reaching nearly 9% of regional employment in 2024 indicates that tourism has consolidated its position as one of the region's main economic drivers, contributing significantly to job creation and to the dynamization of complementary activities such as trade, transport, and culture.

3. ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF THE DESTINATION

3.1. REVENUE, ACCOMMODATION REVENUE AND FOOD SERVICE REVENUE



Source: Azores Regional Statistics Service | Tourism

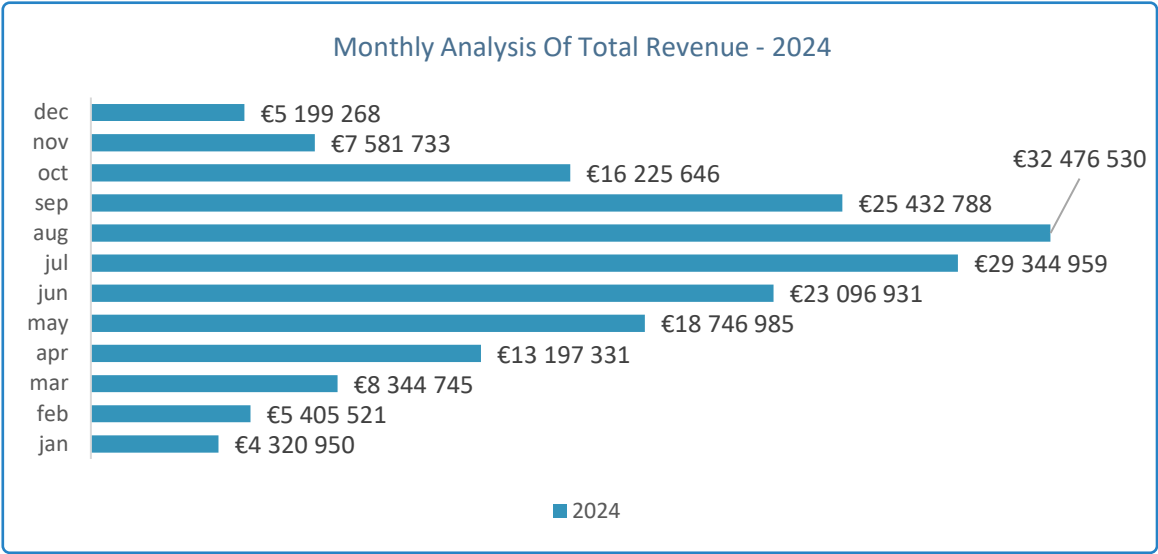
In 2024, tourist accommodation establishments in the Azores generated €189.4 million in total revenue, confirming the sector’s growing economic importance for the region. The largest share came from accommodation revenue, which reached €146.6 million, representing approximately 77% of the total. Food service revenue amounted to €39.4 million, about 21% of the total, highlighting its complementary—yet still significant—role within overall tourism activity.

Between 2019 and 2024, total tourism revenue in the Azores followed a trajectory marked by the sharp decline caused by the pandemic and a rapid, sustained recovery in subsequent years. In 2019, tourist establishments recorded €108.9 million in revenue. However, in 2020, the effects of the health crisis led to an abrupt drop of -74.8%, with revenue falling to just €27.5 million.

Recovery began in 2021, with revenue more than doubling to €68.2 million (+148.2% compared to 2020). In 2022, the growth trend intensified, reaching €129.2 million, corresponding to an increase of +89.3%. This trajectory continued in 2023, with €160.6 million (+24.3%), and consolidated in 2024, when revenue reached €189.4 million, an additional growth of +17.9%, setting a new historical record.

In just four years, tourism revenue in the Azores grew nearly sevenfold compared to 2020 and exceeded 2019 levels by €80 million. This performance confirms not only the resilience of the tourism sector in the region but also its increasing importance as an economic driver, reflecting the rise in overnight stays, the growing weight of international demand, and the sector’s ability to convert destination attractiveness into effective revenue.

3.2. MONTHLY ANALYSIS OF TOTAL REVENUE, AZORES, 2024



Source: Azores Regional Statistics Service | Tourism

In 2024, total tourism revenue in the Azores reached a monthly average of €15.8 million; however, its distribution throughout the year reveals strong seasonality. The lowest values were recorded at the beginning and end of the year, with only €4.3 million in January and similarly low figures in February, November, and December.

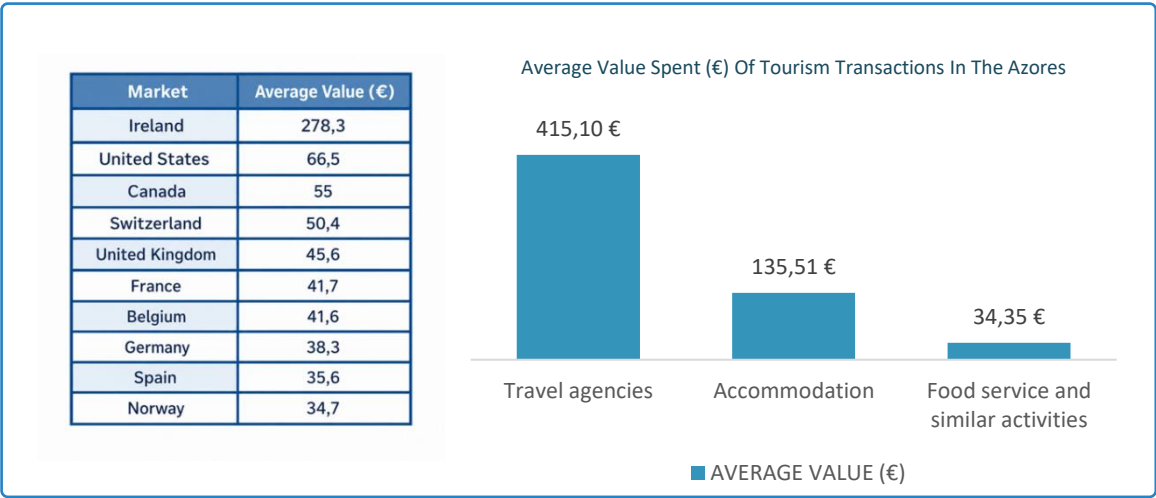
From spring onwards, revenue increases significantly, exceeding €20 million in May and intensifying during the summer. In July, revenue rose to nearly €30 million, peaking in August at €32.5 million—more than double the monthly average. September still recorded high values (around €26 million), but from October onwards a sharp decline is observed, returning to levels close to those of the winter months.

The year-on-year variation line shows that, although growth compared to 2023 is consistent, it also follows this seasonal pattern, with more pronounced increases in the months of highest tourism demand.

In summary, the data confirms that, despite the record-high revenue in 2024, the tourism economy in the Azores remains highly dependent on the peak season, concentrating most of its revenue in the summer months. This pattern reinforces the need for strategies aimed at temporal and product diversification, to better distribute tourism revenue throughout the year.

3.3. AVERAGE TOURIST EXPENDITURE, 2024

TOP 10 MARKETS WITH THE HIGHEST AVERAGE SPENT PER OPERATION



Source: TravelBI by Turismo de Portugal | Sustainable Indicators

The average value of tourism transactions in the Azores reveals significant differences across source markets and sectors of activity (NACE).

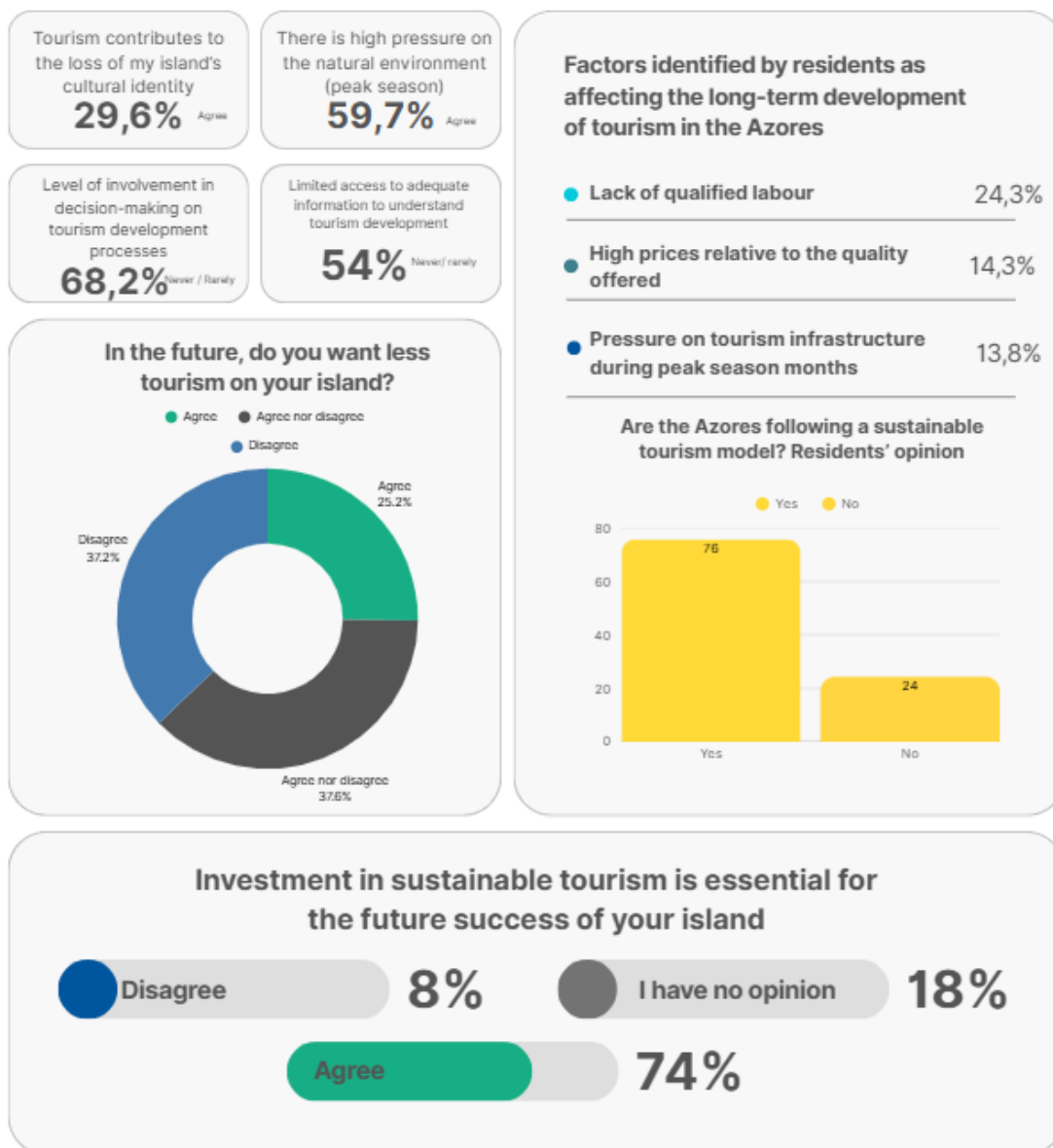
Regarding international markets, Ireland stands out markedly, with an average value of €278.3 per transaction, far exceeding all other markets. Although it is not among the main source markets in terms of visitor volume to the Azores, it is one of the highest-spending, giving it strategic importance due to its capacity to generate higher revenue per tourist. It is followed by the United States (€66.5) and Canada (€55), confirming the importance of the diaspora and transatlantic connections. European markets show more moderate average values, with Switzerland (€50.4), the United Kingdom (€45.6), France (€41.7), and Belgium (€41.6) ranging between €40 and €50. Traditional markets such as Germany (€38.3), Spain (€35.6), and Norway (€34.7) record lower, yet still relevant, values. This contrast highlights that some smaller markets in absolute terms can generate higher average expenditure, representing strategic potential for the destination.

Regarding the analysis by NACE (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities), average transaction values also vary significantly. Travel agencies show the highest value (€415.1), reflecting aggregated operations such as package tours and full-service bookings. The accommodation sector ranks second with €135.5, confirming the central role of lodging within the tourism expenditure structure. Finally, food service and similar activities record the lowest average value (€34.35), which, despite their cultural and experiential relevance, indicates a lower economic intensity per transaction.

In summary, the data reveal that tourism in the Azores is characterized by strong heterogeneity: certain markets, such as Ireland and the United States, present high average values per transaction, while from a sectoral perspective, travel agencies concentrate the highest-value operations. These results are key to guiding market strategies and policies aimed at attracting higher-value tourists, while also highlighting the need to diversify the gastronomic and cultural offer to increase average expenditure in segments such as food services.

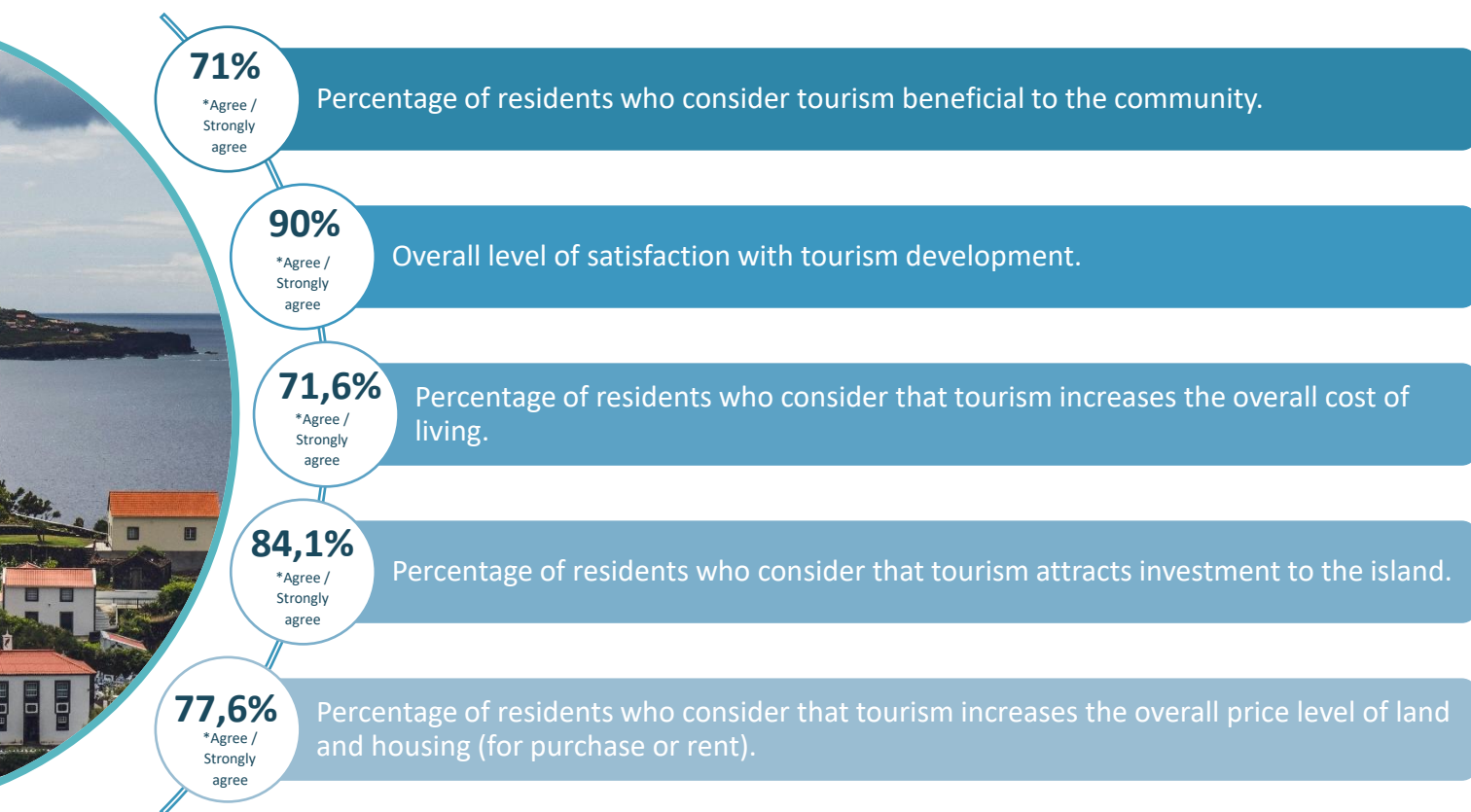
3.4. RESIDENT SATISFACTION

- 833 valid surveys
- Survey period: May to September 2024
- Islands: Faial, Terceira and São Miguel (the three main islands in terms of concentration of regional tourism activity).



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory

CONTINUATION OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESIDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory

3.5. CONCLUSIONS

The survey on Azores residents' perceptions of the Region's tourism development reveals an overall positive view of the sector's role. Most respondents recognize the benefits of tourism, with 71% considering it beneficial for the community and 90% expressing overall satisfaction with tourism development. Residents particularly value the economic impacts, highlighting that tourism contributes to job creation (79.9%), attracts investment (84.1%), and stimulates the local economy. From a cultural perspective, 68.3% acknowledge that tourism has helped enhance intangible heritage, such as traditions, festivities, and gastronomy, while 57.6% note its contribution to the preservation of natural heritage and endogenous resources.

Despite these benefits, the study also reveals significant concerns regarding the negative effects of tourism activity. A substantial share of residents associate tourism with an increase in the cost of living (71.6%) and rising housing and rental prices (77.6%). From an environmental perspective, 63% believe that tourism exacerbates pollution, and 59.7% highlight pressure on ecosystems and natural resources, particularly during the peak season. Only 39.7% believe that tourism improves the population's quality of life, and 29.6% express concerns about the loss of cultural identity, associating excessive visitor numbers with risks to the authenticity of the destination.

When asked about the future of tourism in the Azores, residents demonstrate a clear awareness of the need to strengthen sustainability. The majority (74%) agree that investment in sustainable tourism is essential for the Region's success, although around a quarter of respondents do not consider that the current model consistently follows this path. Among the factors identified as long-term constraints are the lack of qualified labour (24.3%), pressure on tourism infrastructure (13.8%), and high prices relative to the quality offered (14.3%).

Overall, the findings point to a broad consensus: tourism is recognized as an economic and cultural driver of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, but residents also warn of the risks associated with seasonality, rising living costs, and environmental pressure. It is therefore essential to strengthen planning strategies, diversify the tourism offer, and enhance community participation, ensuring that sector growth remains balanced and aligned with the sustainability principles that guide the destination.

4. TOURIST' SATISFACTION

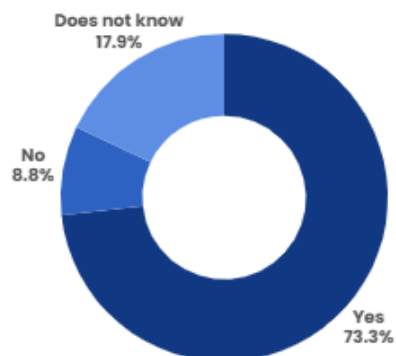
- 1,540 valid surveys
- Survey period: IATA Summer 2024
- Islands: Faial, Terceira and São Miguel

Net Promoter Score:

NPS=%Promoters-%Detractors

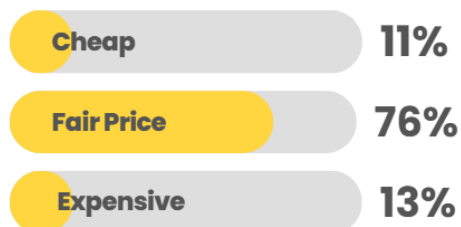
● 2019	77	▲
● 2022	84	▲
● 2023	85	▲
● 2024	67	▼

Intention to return to the destination:

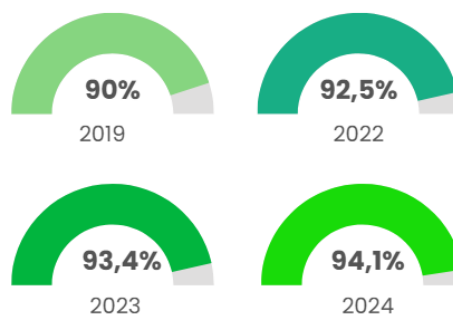


Net Promoter Score: An indicator that measures the likelihood of a destination being recommended, based on visitor reviews.

Economic evaluation of the Azores Destination in relation to the quality offered:



Overall Destination Evaluation Index



Overall satisfaction with the Azores Destination has exceeded 90% since 2019.

Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory

4.1. CONCLUSIONS

The survey conducted in 2024 confirms that visitors to the Azores report a high overall level of satisfaction with their experience at the destination. Among the most valued aspects are natural resources and landscapes, as well as tranquility and safety, which reinforce the image of the archipelago as a sustainable and authentic nature-based destination. The hospitality of the local population and the perception of good environmental practices further strengthen this position, constituting distinctive elements aligned with the principles of responsible tourism.

Regarding the quality of the offer, the results are equally positive. Accommodation, food services, and air transport received favorable evaluations, alongside the satisfaction expressed regarding the available activities, particularly those related to nature, culture, and gastronomy. These indicators demonstrate that the tourism offer consistently meets demand motivations and ensures a good balance between the experience delivered and the investment made—key aspects for the destination’s competitiveness.

Despite this positive assessment, the survey also highlights some weaknesses that affect tourism experience. Areas identified for improvement include land and maritime public transport, tourism signage, and certain supporting infrastructures—dimensions directly linked to mobility and internal accessibility. These factors should be considered in future planning strategies, as they significantly influence the overall perception of destination quality.

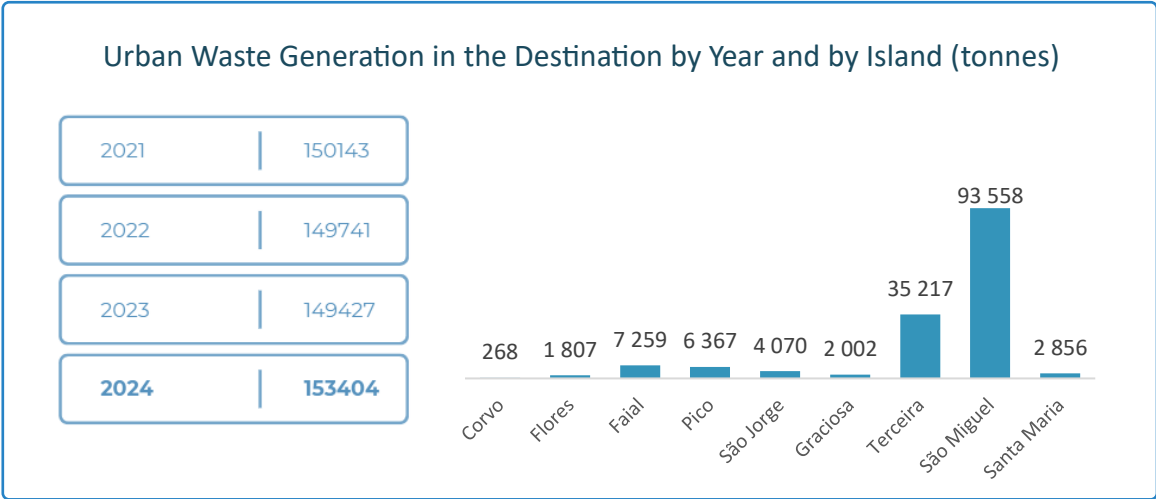
The decline in the Net Promoter Score (NPS) in 2024 reflects precisely the impact of these constraints. Although natural resources, tranquility, and hospitality continue to be widely recognized, shortcomings in mobility and infrastructure, combined with the strong concentration of demand during the summer months, have contributed to perceptions of lower quality. Increased international visibility of the destination, raising visitor expectations, may also have led to a higher proportion of more critical evaluations. As a result, the willingness to recommend the Azores has declined, highlighting the need to address these key areas.

Finally, it is important to note that the international certification of the Azores as the world’s first sustainable archipelago remains largely unknown among visitors. Most respondents were not aware of this recognition, indicating that, despite its strategic relevance, certification is not yet a determining factor in travel decisions. The choice to visit the Azores continues to be primarily driven by the attractiveness of its natural landscapes, cultural authenticity, and the experience of direct contact with nature—elements that remain the main drivers of tourism demand in the archipelago.

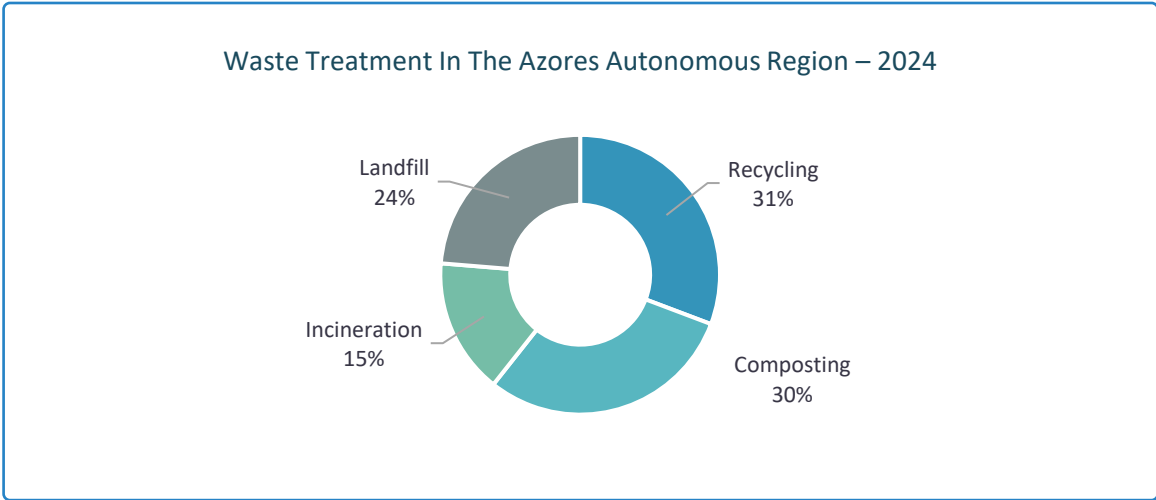
5. WASTE, ENERGY AND WATER

5.1. WASTE MANAGEMENT

In 2024, annual municipal waste generation *per capita* in the Azores Autonomous Region (RAA) was 649 kg, corresponding to a daily rate of 1.78 kg *per capita*.



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory – Adapted from SREA

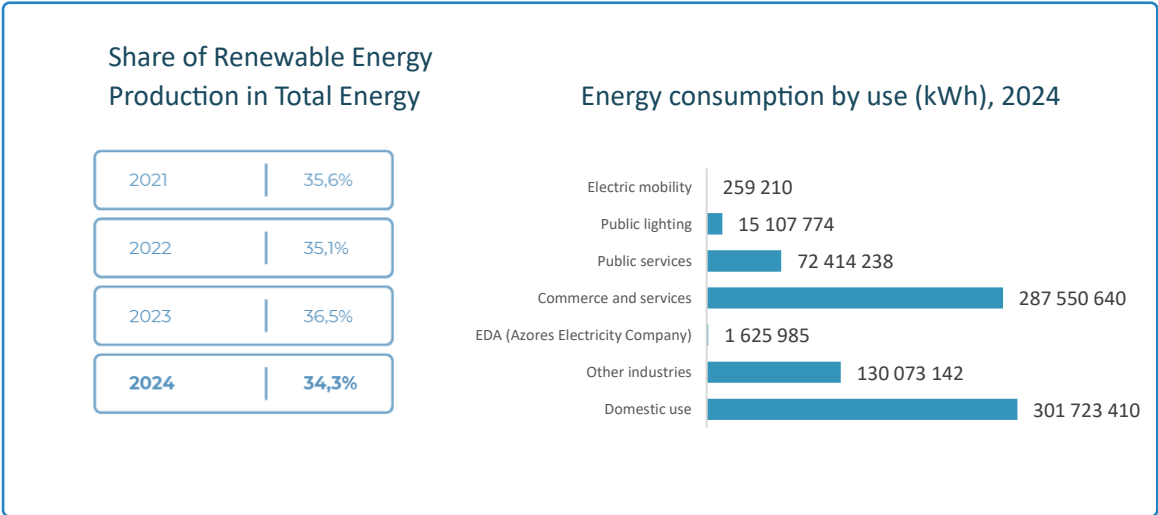


Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory – Adapted from Azores Regional Waste Information System

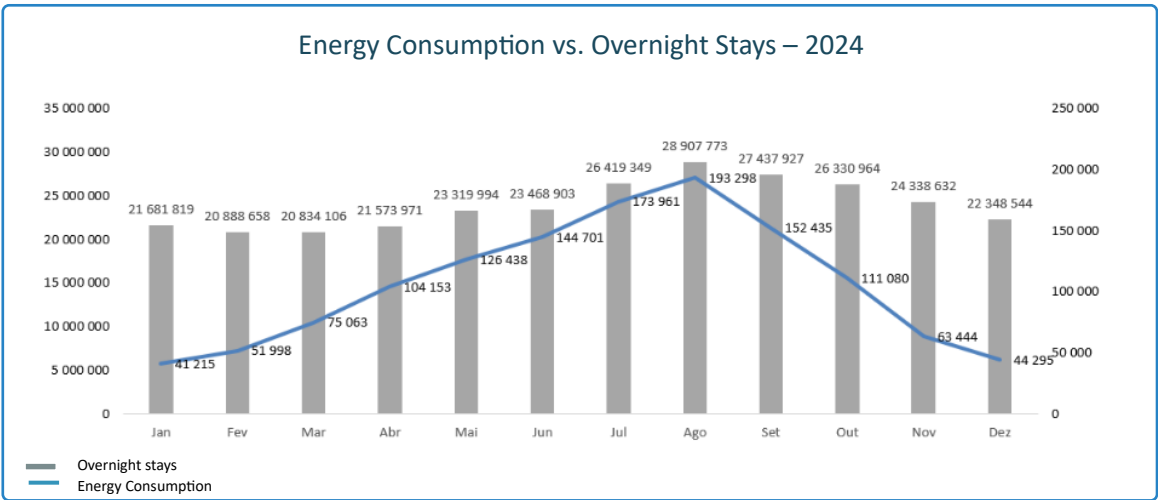
In 2024, a total of 153,404 tonnes of municipal waste (MW) were generated in the Autonomous Region of the Azores, representing an increase of 3,977 tonnes compared to the previous year, when 149,427 tonnes were recorded. Despite this rise, it is not yet possible to establish a direct correlation between monthly waste generation, and the number of people present each month, including both the resident population and tourists. This limitation prevents a precise assessment of whether the higher influx of visitors during peak season corresponds to an actual increase in waste generation, which would be essential to evaluate the real impact of tourism on the archipelago's environmental management.

5.2. ENERGY MANAGEMENT

In 2024, the Azores Destination achieved a total electricity production of 861,227,368 kWh, exceeding regional consumption, which stood at 808,754,399 kWh. This balance highlights the destination’s capacity to meet its energy needs, reinforcing the importance of integrated management of production and consumption within the framework of regional sustainability.



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory – Adapted from SREA

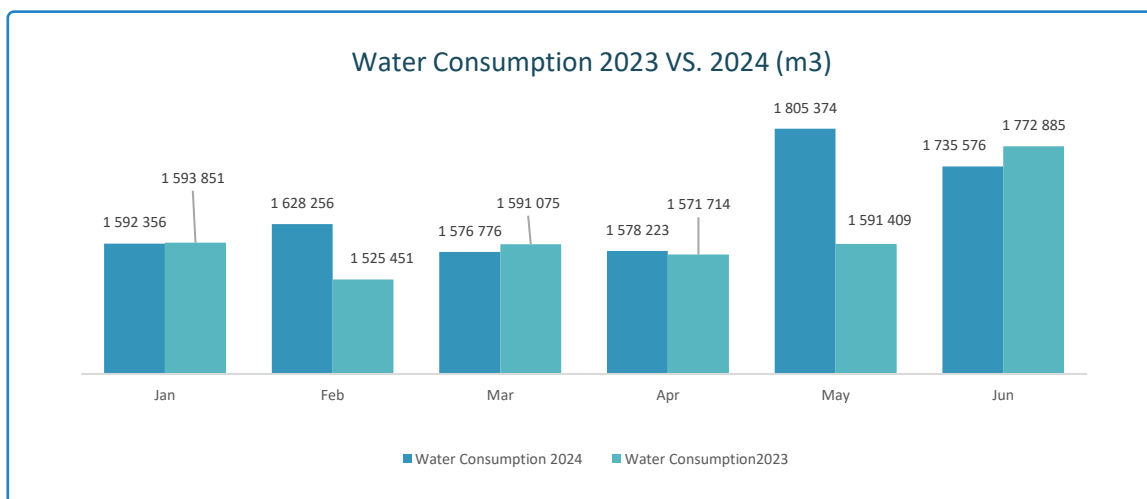


Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory – Adapted from SREA

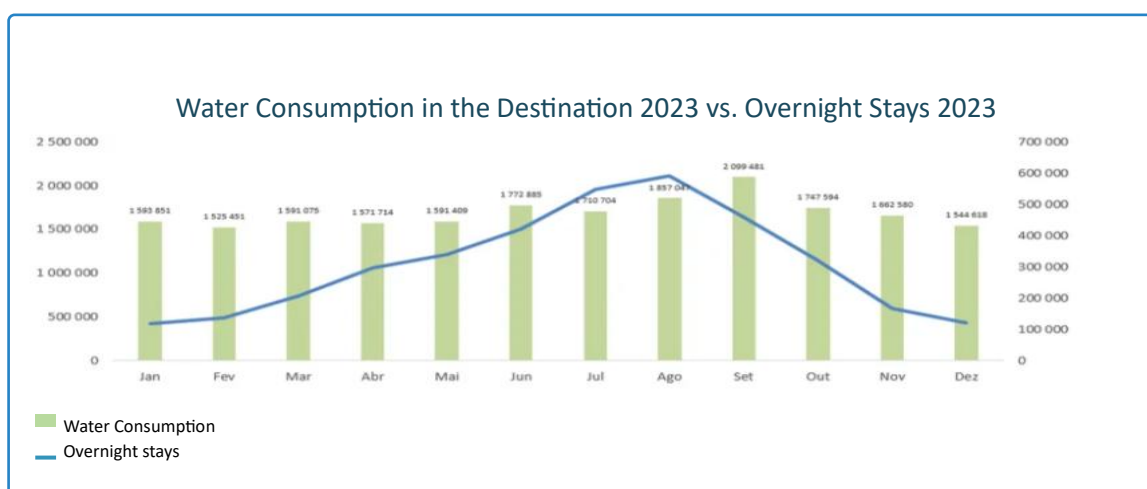
During the peak tourism season, between June and September, a strong correlation is observed between the increase in tourist overnight stays and the intensification of electricity consumption in the commerce and services sector. The significant rise in demand for accommodation, food services, and tourism activities translates into higher energy use, with consumption reaching its highest levels of the year during the summer months. This dynamic clearly highlights the pressure exerted by tourism activity on the destination’s energy system.

5.3. WATER MANAGEMENT

Between January and June 2024, water consumption in the Azores Destination reached 9,916,561 m³, exceeding by approximately 270 thousand m³ the value recorded in the same period of 2023 (9,646,385 m³). This variation corresponds to an increase of around 2.8%, reflecting greater pressure on water resources in the first half of the year. It should be noted that the data analyzed refers exclusively to this period, as information for the second half of 2024 is not yet available.



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory – Adapted from SREA



Source: Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory – Adapted from SREA

This analysis uses 2023 data, as complete records for water consumption in the Azores Destination for 2024 are not yet available. Therefore, a correlation was established between the number of tourists overnight stays across all types of accommodation and the volume of water consumed in the Region in 2023.

The results show a direct relationship between tourism seasonality and water consumption. During the peak tourism months, from June to September, overnight stays increase markedly, accompanied by a significant rise in water consumption, which reaches its highest level in September, reflecting the extension of the peak season. Conversely, during periods of lower tourist demand, both overnight stays and water consumption record substantially lower values.

However, the increase in water consumption cannot be attributed solely to tourism. During the summer months, residents also consume more water due to seasonal factors such as warmer weather and greater needs for irrigation, hygiene, and leisure activities.

6. ACCESSIBILITY

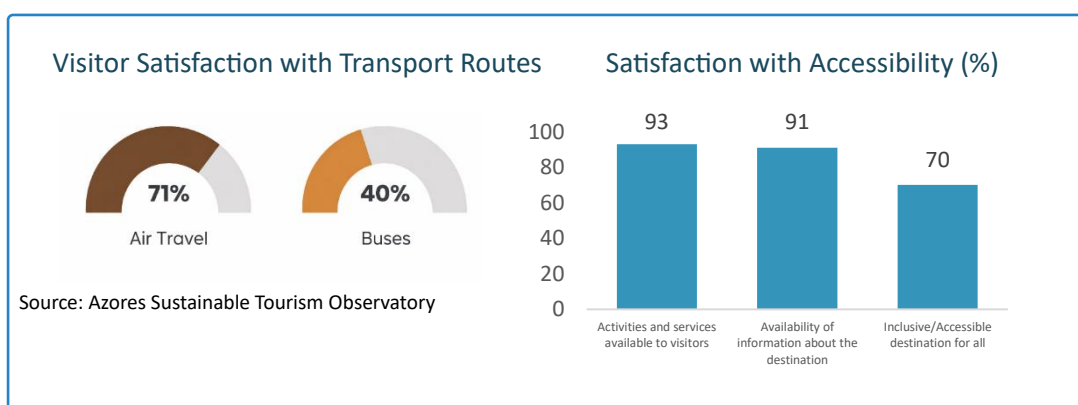
6.1. AZORES DESTINATION

The Azores islands are primarily accessible by air, through a regular network of connections that ensures connectivity between all islands and with destinations outside the archipelago. Three airports concentrate the reception of international flights, subsequently ensuring connections to the remaining islands through inter-island routes.

At the same time, maritime connections play a highly relevant role within the central group, where daily routes provide mobility between São Jorge, Pico, and Faial. Notably, there is a regular connection between São Jorge and Faial, with a stop on Pico Island, as well as frequent traffic between Pico and Faial, facilitating the movement of residents and visitors within this sub-region of the archipelago.

On each island, land transport is provided by bus services, primarily designed to meet the everyday needs of the resident population. However, these routes present limitations in providing direct access to certain tourist sites, as they prioritize the most used routes by local communities. As such, although a public transport network is available, full accessibility to the main tourist attractions largely depends on the use of private transport or complementary mobility services.

Regarding accessibility for people with reduced mobility or other specific needs, it is important to highlight that most hotel units in the Azores are adapted for visitors with mobility impairments, complying with current legislation that establishes mandatory accessibility standards. In addition to this infrastructural dimension, the destination offers specialized support services for families traveling with individuals with reduced mobility, autism, or other conditions, ensuring tailored assistance and the availability of adapted tourism routes. This inclusive approach reinforces the archipelago's commitment to promoting accessible tourism, ensuring equal opportunities to enjoy the tourism experience.



7. CLIMATE CHANGE

7.1. REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Considering the growing importance of climate change for the sustainability of the planet and, consequently, for the Autonomous Region of the Azores, the Regional Government has established the Regional Strategy for Climate Change (ERAC), taking into account, among others, the objectives of the Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the challenge that climate change poses to the international community in counteracting global warming and preparing societies to deal with its biophysical and socio-economic impacts.

This Strategy aims to address the root of the problem through mitigation policies, primarily focused on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as well as through adaptation actions and policies that enable societies to cope with the transformations that, nevertheless, are considered inevitable.

The Regional Strategy for Climate Change is based on a detailed understanding of the constraints of the Azores archipelago, as well as its exceptional potential. Only in this way will it be possible to successfully face the anticipated changes, while preserving the ancestral relationship between people, territory, and the sea, as well as with climatic elements—factors that are inseparable from the islands' identity.

AZORES CARBON NEUTRALITY ROADMAP – 2024

This instrument constitutes a key tool for establishing, with greater precision, metrics related to net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and, based on this information, defining the strategy, mitigation measures, and necessary efforts for the decarbonization of each of the most relevant sectors, enabling the Azores to pursue a successful pathway towards carbon neutrality.



Source: Regional Government of the Azores

GREENHOUSE GASES

In 2024, total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the Autonomous Region of the Azores reached 970 thousand t CO₂eq, with electricity generation standing out as the main contributor, accounting for 383 thousand t CO₂eq. Direct and energy-related emissions (Scopes 1 and 2) remained at this level, with an average of 3.82 t CO₂eq per capita.

In inter-island transport, emissions decreased to 80.7 g CO₂/PKM, while 539 t CO₂ were voluntarily offset by 5,243 passengers. These data indicate targeted improvements in efficiency but also point to a continued overall upward trend in emissions.

Source: Azores DMO, “Sustainability” Report

LIGHT POLLUTION MITIGATION AND “SOS CORY’S SHEARWATER” PROGRAM

For the fifth consecutive year, the Azores are at the forefront of mitigating light pollution affecting seabirds at a global level. Several municipalities, among other entities, are setting an example by implementing a general blackout of public lighting to protect Cory’s shearwaters (*Calonectris borealis*) from 28 October to 2 November, as well as switching off and reducing lighting along coastal areas and ports during the SOS Cory’s Shearwater Campaign.

These actions take place during the fledging period of juvenile Cory’s shearwaters, starting from 9 p.m., to minimize the impact of light pollution on their first flights. This measure aims to protect one of the most threatened groups of birds in the world, reduce the impact of light pollution, raise awareness of this issue, and increase public knowledge about this threat affecting the most abundant seabird species in Macaronesia.

Source: (SPEA – Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds)

SATA AZORES AIRLINE

The SATA Air Açores Group, the Azorean airline, is one of the carriers providing international connections to the region and the only operator responsible for inter-island flights. In the context of climate change mitigation, it has been implementing relevant measures, namely the progressive renewal of its fleet with more efficient aircraft featuring lower specific fuel consumption, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions per passenger-kilometer.

At the same time, it has invested in route optimization and operational procedures, promoting more sustainable and efficient flight practices. The SATA Group also participates in international emissions monitoring and offsetting programs, in line with global commitments in the civil aviation sector under the CORSIA framework, reinforcing its role as a strategic and environmentally responsible operator in the archipelago’s air transport system.

Source: SATA Air Açores

AZORES NETWORK OF PROTECTED TERRESTRIAL AND MARINE AREAS

The Azores have an extensive network of protected areas, covering both terrestrial and marine ecosystems, which play a fundamental role in preserving biodiversity and mitigating the effects of climate change. In 2024, the Region strengthened its leadership in this field with the approval of the largest network of marine protected areas in the North Atlantic, ensuring the protection of around 30% of its maritime zone.

At the same time, the nine islands maintain a vast terrestrial area under environmental protection status, including natural parks, biosphere reserves, and areas classified under the Natura 2000 Network. These measures have been accompanied by concrete actions for the conservation of endemic flora and fauna, including habitat restoration programs, control of invasive species, and protection of seabirds.

Through this integrated strategy, the Azores contribute not only to the preservation of natural resources but also to the adaptation of the territory to climate change, strengthening ecosystem resilience and the sustainability of the tourism destination.

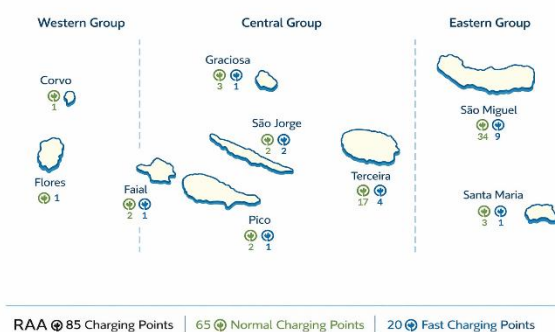
Source: Regional Government of the Azores

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MOBILITY: ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN RENT-A-CAR SERVICES

In the tourism mobility sector, the growing efforts of rent-a-car companies in the Azores to include electric vehicles in their fleets stand out, in line with the energy transition and in response to the increasing demand for more sustainable transport solutions. Several operators already offer fully electric models, as well as hybrid vehicles, allowing visitors to choose lower environmental impact alternatives during their stay.

Although there is not yet a consolidated record of the total number of electric vehicles available, their increasing presence, supported by the expansion of the regional charging network, represents a relevant contribution to reducing emissions in the tourism-related mobility sector.

Electric charging points serving visitors and residents



Source: Regional Government of the Azores

8. GOVERNANCE

8.1. AZORES DMO – TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Under the authority of the Regional Government of the Azores and the Regional Secretariat for Tourism, Mobility and Infrastructure, the main role of the DMO is to coordinate sustainability efforts and initiatives, acting as a catalyst for the development of sustainable tourism among public and private sector stakeholders.

The Azores are the first archipelago in the world to be certified as a sustainable tourism destination by the international certification body *EarthCheck*, in accordance with the criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

ACTION PLAN 2019–2030 | ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABILITY

Since 2019, nine Green Teams have been established, providing a regular platform to discuss the progress of sustainability actions implemented across the territory. The Green Teams are composed of representatives from municipalities, as well as public and private entities representing various economic, social, environmental, and cultural sectors.



ACTIONS

The Action Plan for Destination Sustainability reflects the commitment of the Autonomous Region of the Azores to the continuous and holistic development of the territory, serving as a guiding framework for the Region's actions towards sustainable development.

It is developed with contributions from all public management structures, members of the Internal Working Group, the Green Teams, and the wider community.

The aim is for the Azores to increasingly establish themselves as a leading and benchmark tourism destination, distinguished by its sustainable performance, where a balance is achieved between environmental, economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

The actions proposed in the Action Plan address sustainability across these four dimensions and demonstrate a direct commitment to achieving and respecting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the United Nations.

In 2023, a new version of the Sustainability Charter was launched, adapting it to emerging societal challenges. Under this new model, municipalities across the Region joined collectively, assuming responsibility and commitment to adopting sustainable practices. The updated Sustainability Charter now encompasses departments and entities across all sectors, no longer being driven solely by the tourism sector.

The ODSlocal platform aims to mobilize decision-makers, municipal technicians, local stakeholders, and citizens around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting their initiatives and promoting the creation of a community of actors committed to sustainable development.

In addition to enabling the capacity-building of various local sustainability stakeholders, the ODSlocal portal functions as an interactive tool for monitoring indicators, mapping best practices, and communicating flagship municipal projects.

Source: Azores DMO, Sustainability Charter



8.2. AZORES TOURISM STRATEGIC AND MARKETING PLAN – HORIZON 2030

The PEMTA 2030 represents a strategic revision of the previous plan, with a horizon to 2030, establishing guidelines to align tourism development in the Azores with current demands for sustainability, quality, and innovation.

The plan reaffirms nature—both land and sea—as the priority product, keeping nature tourism at the core of the offer, while strengthening the value of culture, gastronomy, wines, and wellness as strategic complements.

One of the central pillars of PEMTA 2030 is environmental sustainability. The plan builds on the recognition of the Azores as a certified sustainable tourism destination and aims to consolidate this status by setting more ambitious targets, including achieving “Gold” certification.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to balance tourism growth with the preservation of natural heritage, avoiding negative impacts on ecosystems, trails, fauna, flora, and infrastructure, particularly on the smaller islands.

In terms of market and supply, PEMTA 2030 defines priority target segments and more segmented communication strategies, focusing on international positioning under the promise of an “exclusive experience” and the validation of regional identity (visiting all nine islands as a personal achievement). It also includes a strong digital component—covering destination digital diagnostics, optimization of online presence and sales channels—as well as pricing and distribution policies aligned with global tourism trends.

Finally, the plan highlights that all proposed actions should generate value for residents and the territory, promoting a more balanced distribution of tourism throughout the year and across all islands. The strategy advocates for more integrated governance among stakeholders, coordination between public and private entities, and alignment of tourism businesses with PEMTA principles to ensure that tourism growth contributes sustainably to regional development.

Source: Regional Government of the Azores

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This report reflects the active participation of the Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory (OTSA) in the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories, under the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), highlighting its ongoing commitment to the systematic, consistent, and comparable monitoring of tourism impacts across territories.

Throughout this report, it has been possible to follow the evolution of tourism activity in the Autonomous Region of the Azores, identifying trends, challenges, and opportunities that reinforce the importance of an integrated and sustainable approach to sector development.

In this context, OTSA establishes itself as a reference hub in the production of independent, technical-scientific knowledge oriented towards decision-making, contributing to more informed and responsible destination governance.

The results presented underscore the importance of continuous monitoring as a key instrument to support public policies and management strategies that promote a balance between economic development, environmental conservation, and the well-being of local communities.

Thus, this report represents not only an analytical exercise but also a contribution to consolidating a sustainable tourism model in the Azores, aligned with international best practices and with the guiding principles of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories.

TEAM

This report was prepared by the team of the Azores Sustainable Tourism Observatory, composed of Carlos Santos (CEO), Sónia Céu (Senior Technician), and Nina Câmara (Senior Technician).

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