

Interreg



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Organizing Hikes for Foreigners and Cross-Cultural Social Groups



<https://baltictrails.eu/lv>

Project: “ **Forest and Coastal Hiking Trail’s accessibility improvement for different social groups**” (EE-LV0013), 01.07.2023. – 30.06.2026.

Project partners:



Latvian Rural Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs”



Kurzeme Planning Region



Vidzeme Planning Region



Movement Spontaneous, Latvia



Riga Planning Region



MTÜ Maaturism, Estonian Rural Tourism Association



Pärnu Bay Rotari Club

The Municipality of Häädemeeste, Estonia

Setomaa Municipality, Estonia

NGO “Peipsimaa tourism”, Estonia

Organizing Hikes for Foreigners and Cross-Cultural Social Groups

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Specific target audience: people with language and cultural barriers.

Secondary target audience: entrepreneurs, guides, and organisations wishing to develop services for foreigners, international tourists, and students.

A social expert organisation consulted during the development of the solution: the adventure organisation “Boards You”.

Solution implementer: Movement Spontaneous.

1. Objective

The **Accessible Hiking Trails** initiative aims to open up the natural landscapes of Latvia and Estonia to social groups of foreigners living temporarily in these countries. These groups include international students, international employees, refugees, and tourists. Through simple, accessible hikes this project promotes an inclusive environment where people from different cultural backgrounds can enjoy nature, connect with locals, and build new relationships.

These guidelines have been created to help **hiking organizers, service providers, NGOs, and local authorities** successfully plan and carry out hikes that are accessible to foreign participants. They provide practical, step-by-step instructions on how to:

- Engage and motivate international participants,
- Plan and lead inclusive and safe hikes,
- Overcome language barriers and cultural differences,
- Ensure all participants, regardless of their experience or knowledge of the local terrain, feel comfortable and welcome.

2. Identifying and Engaging Your Target Audience

- **Who to Engage:** Foreign students (e.g., Erasmus exchange students), international employees, refugees, tourists.
- **How to Engage:** Use social media platforms like Facebook Groups, Instagram, and WhatsApp (e.g., Erasmus Network) to promote your hike. Also ask local universities and

NGO’s to share information within their international audience. Influencers and content creators within the target group can be great promoters.

Key Motivators:

- Free participation and free food are key to attracting participants.
- Good weather and a simple packing list will help avoid dropouts.
- Keep hikes short and beginner-friendly (10-15 km is ideal).
- Using international languages like English for advertising and communication will be more welcoming than relying on local languages.

3. Organizing the Hike

Planning:

- **Route:** Use tested and safe routes to avoid issues. Choose easy and short to medium length routes, 10-15 km is perfect for new hikers. Use websites such as Baltictrails.eu to find and download GPX files for the chosen route. A GPX file (Figure 1) is a standard file format used to store GPS data, such as routes, waypoints, and tracks. It’s commonly used for outdoor activities like hiking or cycling, allowing users to share and follow pre-planned routes on GPS devices or apps.

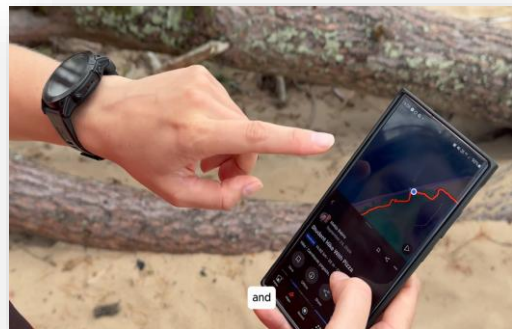


Figure 1: Using a GPX file on a smart device

- **Group size:** Group size will depend on the popularity of the event and engagement of foreign communities. Make sure you create a registration form and also mention if there are any limits to the group size. Expect 50-80% of registered participants to show up. If the

weather forecast is not favorable, expect a larger dropout rate. If numbers of the group exceed 50 people, make sure to contact the local municipality for approval and additional guidance.

- **Pre-event communication:** Information about a public event (Figures 2, 3) must be created on one of the social media platforms.



Figure 2: Example of an advertising image



Figure 3: Example of a promotional post shared by the RTU International Students Department on Instagram

First step. Facebook is currently a great platform to create a public event (Figure 4), reaching a wide audience and attracting diverse participants. Ensure the event page is engaging

and informative, with details about the hike's purpose, meeting point, schedule, and level of difficulty. Use accessible language, primarily in English, and add vibrant images of past hikes or the landscapes participants will experience to spark interest and excitement.

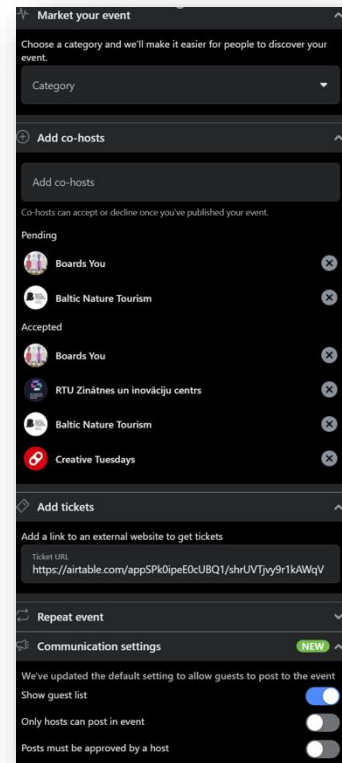


Figure 4: Creating a Facebook event or other public event platform.

Screenshot of creating a Facebook event. Some tips for creating events include adding co-organizers, clearly stating the location and time, adding a registration link, and organizing content into bullet points with visual aids like emojis. It's also worth considering other platforms besides Facebook for promoting your event.

Second step. Create a registration form, with questions / fields such as (Figure 5 a,b):

- Name and surname
- Phone nr. with country code (If you plan to create a WhatsApp group chat (Figure 6))
- E-mail (If you plan to send information via email)
- Your Nationality

- Instagram or other social media (if a participant wants to be tagged in the photos and videos)
- I accept that event will be photographed and filmed (Tick-Box)
- I acknowledge and accept that my data will be processed in accordance with applicable data protection regulations (Tick-Box)
- Please provide any relevant information, such as dietary preferences or accessibility requirements
- Space for comments or questions.

Name and surname *

Phone nr. with country code *

Will be used for participants Whatsapp chat

Your Nationality *

Instagram handle

Feel free to add your Instagram @handle if you're okay with being tagged in our stories/photos :)

Are you a Student in Latvia? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Figure 5. a. **Example of a registration form.**
Screenshot of a Student Pizza Hike event registration form created on airtable.com.

Conditional field

Which university are you studying at?

☐ Riga Technical University (RTU)

☐ University of Latvia (LU)

☐ Riga Stradins University (RSU)

☐ Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU)

☐ BA School of Business and Finance (Banku augstskola)

☐ Turība University (TU)

☐ Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (VIA)

☐ Art Academy of Latvia (LMA)

☐ Other

I accept that event will be photographed and filmed *

Comments & Questions

Submit Edit label Team

Figure 5. b. **Example of a registration form**



Figure 6. **WhatsApp chat between participants**

Step three. Include a link to the hike's WhatsApp group to stay in touch with participants. Message practical info about the hike including transport departures, length of the hike, trail route, weather forecast packing list etc. If planning is done by a team of people consider creating a separate communication channel for organizers only.

Fourth step. Ensure you promote your event across various platforms, such as LinkedIn, interest groups, local community centers (via physical posters), and others, as some people may not use Meta products like Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp.

Roles and Responsibilities

When planning an event, participants should be assigned specific roles and responsibilities.

- **Team Leader:** Coordinates the hike, leads the group from the front, and manages communication, must be able to make quick and educated decisions to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all.
- **Support Lead:** Helps guide the group during the hike and ensures that all necessary equipment (e.g. including at least three radios) is available for effective communication, assist with navigation, monitor the group's pace.
- **Activity & Food Lead:** Manages food distribution (snacks or a light meal during the hike), coordinates with service providers or sponsors to deliver the food on site if necessary, and plans any extra activities (games, cultural exchanges).
- **Trail End Coordinator:** Ensures that all participants are accounted for at the end of the hike and communicates with the Team Leader about the group's progress.
- **Communication specialist:** Creates publicity for the event, answers frequently asked questions.

4. Communication and inclusion

- **Overcoming Language Barriers:** All information should be in English (or another widely spoken language), but some participants may still face language barriers. To ensure inclusivity, use visual aids like signs, symbols, and maps with clearly marked routes and important stops to help everyone follow along easily. Apps with GPS trail maps and added landmarks are an excellent solution for providing detailed, accessible information. If further assistance is needed, tools like Google Translate, Siri, or Microsoft Translator can offer real-time voice-to-text translations, ensuring effective communication throughout the hike.
- **Inclusivity:** Avoid separating foreigners from locals; mixed groups foster new connections and experiences.
- **Group Dynamics:**
 - **Introduction Circle:** At the start, have everyone say their name, where they're from, and what they expect from the hike. It breaks the ice and fosters cross-cultural exchanges.
 - **Tracking Participants:** Have a sign-in sheet at the start of the hike to ensure everyone is accounted for. Signing the sheet can also serve as confirmation that participants are responsible for their own safety and as consent for organizers to take photographs of them.
 - **Buddy System:** Pair participants up to foster interaction and ensure no one gets left behind during the hike, enhancing both social dynamics and safety.
 - **Group Roles:** Assign specific roles like "Helper with Food," "Team Exercise Leader," or "Support Lead" to keep the group organized and to encourage teamwork.
 - **Conversation Prompts:** Throughout the hike, suggest

simple conversation topics to encourage discussions, such as asking about favorite hiking experiences or cultural differences.

5. Equipment and Packing List

- **Simple Gear:** Send a packing list (Figure 7) ahead of time to participants. Essentials should include:
 - Comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots (suitable for coastal, forest, or uneven terrain)
 - Weather-appropriate clothing:
 - Waterproof jacket or poncho
 - Layers for warmth (sweater or a thermal shirt for colder days)
 - Light, breathable clothing for warmer weather
 - Sun protection:
 - Sunscreen
 - Hat or cap
 - Sunglasses
 - Hydration and snacks:
 - Water bottle (at least 1–2 liters, especially for longer hikes)
 - Energy-rich snacks (e.g., nuts, dried fruit, granola bars)
 - Comfortable backpack to carry essentials comfortably
 - Personal items:
 - Any necessary medications (especially for allergies or health conditions)
 - Basic first aid items (band-aids, blister pads)
 - **Optional:**
 - Lightweight blanket or mat for resting
 - Trekking poles (for added stability on rough terrain)
 - Bug spray or repellent (particularly in forested areas)

- Power bank for charging phone etc. (especially for longer hikes)
- Camera or smartphone for photos



Figure 7. Simple checklist of things to take with you

Hello! Please read the information about the event below and do not hesitate to ask questions.

📍 Meeting point: September 28 at 10:01 at Lilaste railway station.

🚆 The train leaves Riga Central Railway Station at 9:13. Each participant is responsible for purchasing a public transport ticket. Tickets can be purchased in advance online at Vivi.lv or using the Mobilly app. Of course, you can arrive by bus, car or other transport of your choice.

📱 You will need to perform the activity using your phone during the hike, so make sure it is fully charged or bring a charger.

☐ Don't forget to check the packing list to make sure you have everything you need!

🗺️ Please make sure you check and download the route - <https://strava.app.link/85w7QRQMcNb>

Additional Tip: For those participants who don't own hiking gear, consider offering advice on affordable rental options or local stores where they can purchase essentials at reasonable prices.

6. Food and Activities

- **Motivational Factor:** Food is a big motivator for foreigners and students with tight budgets. Offer free, simple food like sandwiches, fruit, snacks or meals that can be prepared by adding hot water (couscous, buckwheat flakes, corn flakes, pea flakes, potato porridge with milk powder and much more). Try to include dietary options to cater to various preferences (vegetarian, lactose free, halal, etc.).
- **Where to Eat** (Figure 8 a, b): Plan to stop for lunch midway through the hike. It gives participants a chance to rest and socialize. Benches or dry wood logs will be suitable for sitting, but if there are none on the way, you can ask participants to bring sitting pads.
- **Introduction circle** (cover photo): Takes place at the beginning of the hike and serves as an icebreaker for participants to meet each other. The Team Leader initiates the conversation by gathering everyone into a physical circle and posing introductory questions. They also outline the day's agenda, including when breaks will occur. A useful tip is for the Team Leader to use a megaphone to ensure everyone can hear each other clearly.
- **Team-building exercises** (Figure 9): Promote collaboration and enhance connections among participants. Activities can include fun challenges along the way that require teamwork, encouraging communication and interaction. Additionally, shared meal preparation, such as cooking together over a fire, or a sauna break, fosters a friendly atmosphere and strengthens relationships among group members.



Figure 8. a, b. Picture of the ingredients used for the hiking lunch, which were printed as stickers. In addition, a large thermos of hot water was provided. To prepare one meal, 3 tablespoons of base (couscous, buckwheat flakes, corn flakes, etc.), 1 tablespoon of powdered milk for creaminess, and additives such as dill or sun-dried onions, etc. are required.

Griķu pārslas 3 ēd.k. Buckwheat flakes 3 tbs.	Čili un mango pulveris ½ ēd.k. Chili & mango powder ½ tbs.
Kukurūzas pārslas 2 ēd.k. Corn flakes 2 tbs.	Vegānu mērces 3 veidi ½ ēd.k. Vegan souce 3 types ½ tbs.
Zirņu pārslas 3 ēd.k. Pea flakes 3 tbs.	Buljona kubs 3 veidi ¼ kuba bouillon cube 3 types ¼ cube
Kartupeļu pārslas 3 ēd.k. Potato flakes 3 tbs.	Dilles Dill
Piena pulveris 1 ēd.k. Milk powder 1 tbs.	Saulē kaltēti sīpoli Sun-dried onions
Ķiploku un zaļumu pulveris ½ ēd.k. Garlic & herbs powder ½ tbs.	Ķiploku granulas Garlic granules
Ranch pulveris ½ ēd.k. Ranch powder ½ tbs.	Garša un krēmīgums / Flavor and creaminess
Bāze / Base	Piedevas / additives

- **Feedback circle** (Figure 10): Occurs at the end of the hike, providing participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experience. The Team Leader leads this session by gathering everyone into a circle again and encouraging each person to share what they enjoyed the most. They also outline any next steps or plans for future hikes. Again, having a megaphone is beneficial.



Figure 9. Image. **Team building activity.** All 40+ participants had to cross the river with one raft + 10-15 life jackets and SUP paddles. The group developed a strategy to get everyone across the Gauja



Figure 10. Feedback circle

7. Transport and Service Availability

- **Logistics:** Provide clear transportation details well in advance, including public transport routes, schedules, and the exact address of the main transport hub (e.g., train station or bus station). Be sure to clearly specify where participants should

meet at the start of the hike and the time to gather. Finding the right place can be very frustrating for those who are not familiar with the local transportation system and language.

- **Transport and Schedule:** Share links to local transportation schedules for Latvia and Estonia. [Baltictrails.eu](https://baltictrails.eu) provides a comprehensive summary of available routes and schedules for hikers, covering all types of transportation, including air, car, bus, and train, specifically tailored for the Baltic region: [Baltic Coastal Hiking: Getting there & around](#) and [Baltic Forest Hiking: Getting there & around](#).
- **Accommodation:** If the hike is longer or involves multiple days, it's important to inform participants about nearby accommodation options. Hiker-friendly accommodations are often available along the Baltic Trails route. This label is awarded to service providers in the Baltic States that cater specifically to hikers by offering relevant services and amenities. This label is not tied to any specific pathway or route. Find more details about hiker-friendly accommodations here: [Hiker - friendly Sign: Meaning](#) and [Hiker - friendly Accommodation: Providers list](#).

- **Cancellations:** In the event of a cancellation (e.g., due to severe weather), inform participants as early as possible. However, we advise against canceling for mild bad weather; instead, provide free raincoats or encourage participants to bring appropriate clothing. Ask all participants to notify you if they can't attend. Knowing the exact number of attendees helps organizers better plan activities and meals.

8. Safety and Risks

- **First Aid:** Always carry a basic first aid kit and have a team member responsible for health and safety.

- **Local Hazards:** Provide brief information on local flora/fauna if participants are unfamiliar with them (e.g., ticks, mosquitos, stinging plants).

9. Post-Hike Feedback and Follow-Up

- **Gathering Feedback:** Use a simple questionnaire or poll to gather feedback on the hike's organization, inclusivity, and participant satisfaction.
- **Data gathering:** With previous consent from the questionnaire, record data from the participants (the number that registered vs the number that actually showed up, their nationalities, etc.) to evaluate the success of each event and identify areas for improvement in future hikes.
- **Communication:** Use the participants' chat in e-mail list to inform them about upcoming events, share photos, and provide feedback. Be sure to keep the chat focused and avoid sending spam messages.

10. Recommendations

- **Adapt to Group Size:** For larger groups (over 50), check with the municipality for permits and have at least 3 persons guiding the group, one in the front, one in the middle and one in the back. For smaller groups 1-2 guides are sufficient.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Plan additional activities (e.g., cultural storytelling, games) that encourage participants to share their backgrounds. You can do interviews to better know the participants, you can ask questions such as
- **Be Flexible:** Hiking may take longer than expected, especially if the group is large and diverse in skill level. Plan for extra time. Better promise that the event will be longer, rather than squeezing everything in only a few hours.

As a bonus, there was a pizza making workshop at the end of the event (Figures 11, 12).



Figure 11. Pizza making workshop



Figure 12. Prepared pizzas

10. Partners involved

NGO “Movement Spontaneous” and the Latvian Country Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs”

11. Training video

The training video in English, with English subtitles, can be viewed here (09:58 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaeLxe9UDg0>



12. Useful Resources

Facebook Groups:

- [Expats in Latvia](#) / [Expats & Foreigners in Estonia](#) – Communities where members share information on local events, meetups, and other useful info.
- Latvian groups like [Pārgājieni. Par un Ap.](#) / [Dodies dabā](#) – Groups dedicated to sharing hiking routes, tips, and organizing group hikes across Latvia.
- Estonian groups like [Matkasõbrad](#)

Ārvalstu studentu tīkli:

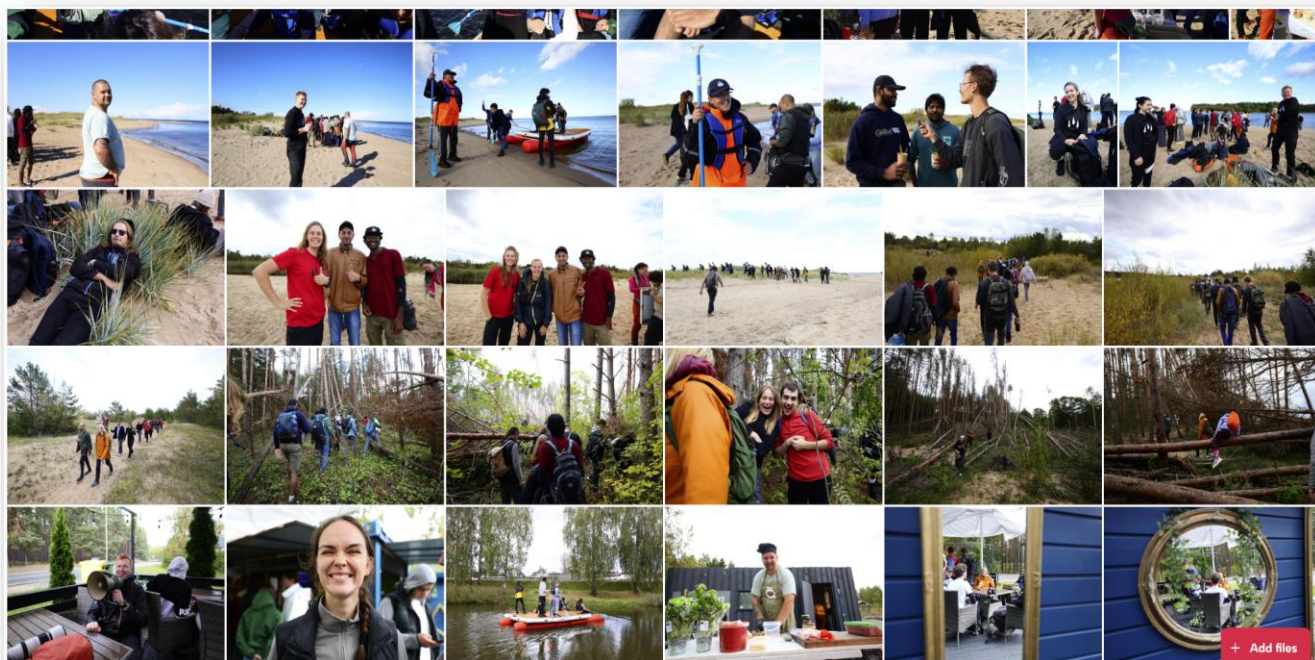
- *Erasmus Student Network e.g. ESN Latvia and ESN Estonia* – Both organizations

announce outdoor events, hikes, and excursions for exchange students.

- RTU International Student department – they are active on social media @rtuinernational, and will be happy to share your event!
- RTU Science And Innovation center chat “RTU jaunie inovatori” with around 500 active members – also a great place where to post info about events to a larger international audience
- RSU Student council and other universities’ councils and foreign student departments

Outdoor Adventure Portals:

- *Baltic Hiking Trails* (Facebook Pages and [Website](#)) – Shares information on cross-border hiking trails, including the [Forest](#) and [Coastal Hiking Trails](#) in Latvia and Estonia.
- Baltic Nature Tourism (Facebook Page, Instagram and [Website](#))
- [Komoot](#) – An app and online community where members can find and share hiking routes in Latvia and Estonia.



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