

Tides of Sustainable Change: The Wadden Sea

Global region

Northwest Europe

Domestic region

North Sea coastal regions of the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark

Internationally Designated Areas

Wadden Sea World Heritage Site

2009

Wadden Sea (Denmark - Germany - Netherlands) Trilateral Transboundary Ramsar Site

2015

Wadden Sea Biosphere Reserve

2016

The Wadden Sea is not only a cohesive wetland stretching 500 km along the coasts of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. This rich ecosystem is also the stage for exemplary transboundary cooperation and sustainable tourism initiatives.

Home to over 10,000 species of plants and animals, this MIDA is the world's largest continuous tidal flats system. For 8,000 years, sea-level rise, wind, and waves have shaped its dynamic landscapes of shifting sandbanks, wide mudflats, salt marshes, islands, dunes, and beaches, inviting visitors to witness natural processes in motion.

This living wetland is a hub for nature-based tourism, offering birdwatchers, hikers, and nature lovers unforgettable encounters with wildlife. As a vital crossroads on the East Atlantic Flyway, the Wadden Sea hosts millions of migratory waterbirds that pause here to rest and feed, the crossover effects along the flyway being crucial for population vitality. From microorganisms to marine mammals, the biodiversity of the region is both globally significant and locally celebrated, connecting people directly with wetlands.

Cooperation for conservation

Because this vast ecosystem spans three nations, its protection and sustainable use rely on transboundary cooperation. Key milestones in international conservation include Germany's first Ramsar Sites in 1976, later added to by Denmark and the Netherlands, and the establishment of the Wadden Sea Trilateral Transboundary Ramsar Site in 2015.

Germany's three UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, established in the early 1990s, subscribe to the idea of combining nature protection and sustainable development under a shared Biosphere Reserve framework, building on the support of the local communities involved. The Wadden Sea was also inscribed in 2009 as a transboundary UNESCO World Heritage property, managed by the Dutch, German, and Danish member organisations of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation.

MIDAs strengthening communities

Visitors can witness firsthand how this vast waterscape of barrier islands, open waters, salt marshes, gullies, and dunes continues to shape the coast and local communities.

Local businesses and communities actively combine conservation with ecotourism through low-impact travel that values nature as both a treasure and a shared resource.

Guided tours, educational programs, and community-based initiatives allow visitors to support conservation while enjoying authentic cultural and natural experiences to ensure that ecotourism contributes to livelihoods, strengthens cooperation, and advances sustainability.