

MERMAID OF BALKANS

mermaidofbalkans.com

MA Web Design and Content Planning

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Abstract

Mermaid of Balkans is my major project for the Ma Web Design and Content Planning. This is a website that serves as a guide for tourists to discover hidden beaches in the Coast of Albania that are only accessible by boat. So, the focus of the site are daily boat trips with every stop displayed in the site, including images and GPS coordinates for the user to locate each place.

I started this report this way to convey the essential part of the project and later to delve deeper in the design process that resulted in the development of this site. First, I have included in the report the crit sessions that shaped the idea and the design of the project including my final decision related to the design. And secondly, I have included all the technologies and methods that I used to develop the website.

In the crit sessions we presented in class included commodity, business and cultural context, delight, firmness, and prototype. During these stages we went through a process of evaluating our ideas through feedback from professionals and tutors. And for me it was crucial in shaping the idea for the major project and eventually learning the foundation of web design.

Furthermore, I will give a detailed report that includes all the technologies used for the project and my understanding on how to use them to the best benefit of the site. To further elaborate on everything in detail I have included a table of contents that will make it easier to read and structure this report.

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1. Introduction

What is Mermaid of Balkans?

Mermaid of Balkans is a website intended for tourists that travel to Albania and would like to discover a bit more about the beautiful Mediterranean beaches and coves. It is a guide with descriptions from the point of view of a tourist (me), location and raw, unedited images that showcase the natural wonder of these areas.

The content for the site is based in three main pillars. That is description, location with a map display in the site and raw images. All these images and other forms of content are collected and created by me. I collected exact location while I was on the trip and took the photos with a simple iPhone camera. I will elaborate on each of these points later in the report.

Before I delve deeper into the project and all the major aspects of the site, I want to say a few words on the motivation and what made me choose this topic for the major project. I am from Albania, and I have spent most of my life there traveling to those hidden and untouched places that are very little known to the world. So, I just wanted to give a glimpse of the beauty and wonders that nature gave to that place. I believe that to be another side of my country that very little people know of. I noticed that when I was presenting at class and from the feedback from my friends at class (Fig 1.0).

Love your new domain name and the logo works really well - the M looks so cool with the tail. Your colour scheme works really well for your site - the turquoise looks amazing with the images of the ocean. I never realised that Albania was so beautiful!

8 days ago

Fig 1.0 Feedback from students in class.

2. Concept

The initial concept of the website was very different from the final result. I started the website concept with a simple idea of a travel website about Albania. This was the starting point of what later would be a unique aspect of the tourism in Albania that differentiated the website from many other competitors that were already there. When I go back through the process, I understand that developing a concept for a website was very different from what I had believed it to be before. Below I will explain how the concept started and the final development.

The first draft for the major project was to create a website that displays travel destinations from the Albanian Coast starting from the northern part of the coastline to the southern part. It would display the location of each destination and how they can find a means of transport from the capital city.

Twitter description:

Travel destinations from the Albanian Coast starting from the northern part of the coastline to the southern part. It would display the location of each destination and how they can find a means of transport from the capital city.

As a first draft it holds the essential idea of the final idea, but I didn't realise that I didn't have a unique point to the site that would narrow down the content that could be included and differentiate it from what was already there online. From the presentation of the concept in the crit session I received very valuable feedback which later helped me shape the idea of the major project.

In the feedback received in class I was aware that the concept was missing some important key points that I had to work on (Fig 2.1). The main problem was with the fact that I didn't have

a unique selling proposition and the way to figure that out was to do more research on the tourism in Albania. It was not until I researched that I finally found a niche to the concept and then finally I could catch up on the work for the website.

```
Vigilant Pheasant 2 days  
- travel sites are popular topics but are generally very difficult due to competitor sites  
- good to narrow down a smaller area  
- what is the USP of your site?  
- the north-to-south idea is a nice method for the presentation on the site, if implemented well  
- good idea to do an English version for promotion  
- do remember that content should be your
```

Fig 2.1 Feedback from the commodity crit.

```
Enthusiastic Albatross  
QUESTIONS (Prisca):  
? How will people find your site amongst the typical travel/review sites?  
  (Think: TripAdvisor / LonelyPlanet etc)  
? Are you mainly promoting to people who already travel to Albania?
```

Fig 2.1 Feedback from the commodity crit.

As a result of that research, I now had a new concept that included all the missing parts from the first concept. Twitter description:

A travel website that gives information about daily boat trips, the destinations visited and a short description of each stopping point including a location map.

What I noticed in the research online for the tourism in Albania is that there is little information about hidden beaches that can be accessed only by boat. To find out what you can visit in a particular area you have to search through different sites and still not find all the places. This was the problem that I was trying to solve through this website. Display all the hidden beaches of Albania that are accessible by boat and display where they are located. Something that I couldn't find anywhere else.

For instance, I had identified that many hidden or less-known beaches in Albania are not well documented in popular travel guides or websites. Tourists often miss out on these beautiful less-crowded destinations. What differentiates these places from others is that most of these hidden places are accessible only by boat.

In other words, the solution that the site was providing was information accessibility where many tourists have a clear guide with consolidated source of information which helps many tourists discover lesser-known beaches that otherwise they would miss. What this means is an enhanced travel experience which makes it easier to explore hidden beaches and enjoy a more diverse range of destinations. This on the other hand helps promote tourism.

The process of research and the feedback from the presentation sessions helped me develop the concept.

Travel destinations from the Albanian Coast starting from the northern part of the coastline to the southern part. It would display the location of each destination and how they can find a means of transport from the capital city.

A travel website that gives information about daily boat trips, the destinations visited and a short description of each stopping point including a location map.

Looking back at the development of the site, the process of designing and the evolution of the initial concept, the hardest part for me was finding a unique concept. Even though one of the first things we were told when discussing the major project is that in the end, we may have a completely different concept from the initial one. However, I was not prepared for the challenge that was creating content and discovering a unique concept.

3. Business and Cultural Concept

Mermaid of Balkans is essentially a travel website that serves as a guide for tourists to discover hidden beaches in Albania. Many hidden beaches in Albania are not well documented in travel guides or websites. This results in tourists missing out on beautiful less crowded destinations. This website provides a consolidated source of information about hidden beaches which helps tourists locate many places that are not displayed anywhere else.

What makes this website unique and how it is differentiated from other competitors. The destinations that are displayed on the website are mostly accessible by boat and belong to the same geographical area. This makes for distinguished content that cannot be found anywhere else.

Except for serving as a guide for many tourists that travel every year to Albania this website also promotes tourism and potentially boosts the local economy. All the boat trips in the coast are made possible by locals who offer amazing experiences with their continuous work. This helps promote their business and can result in an improvement of the economy for the locals in those areas.

Below I have displayed the SWOT analysis for myself as the website developer and the website itself (Table 3.1 and 3.2). The tables below analyse the potential strengths and opportunities and the weaknesses and threats. It was very beneficial to analyse all the aspects of the website development because it helped in preparing for the challenges on the process.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have travelled to many destinations in Albania, and I have experience having lived there all my life. 2. It is something that I am passionate about and I will be motivated to carry on after the course. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It will be difficult to create content because I must travel to collect data and go back and forth between Albania and UK because of work. 2. I must take good photographs and that is not my strongest point.
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning to create content and WordPress which will serve me in the future. 2. Continue to add content when I travel to a new destination. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I must use social media to promote the site and I don't use social media myself; this will make it difficult to create content for the social media platforms.

Table 2.1 SWOT analysis for myself as a web designer.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gives specific information about hidden places that can be reached only by boats and makes it simple for the users to find information. 2. Rich content in photography 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Difficult to add a lot of content because you can only travel during summer, so the update takes a lot of time.
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The website can provide the user with useful information and therefore increase traffic. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Competition is very strong in the travel industry so that can make it difficult to differentiate from other websites.

Table 2.2 SWOT analysis for the website

While I was researching in the web to find a unique selling point to my topic, I found other cognate sites that I could consider as my competition. Most of the Albanian sites that I found were very dated and from a content perspective they had years that hadn't updated the content or adding new content and it was very difficult to find specific information. Another thing that I noticed was that all those sites were

including content about different locations, cultural and historical tourism (Fig 2.1).

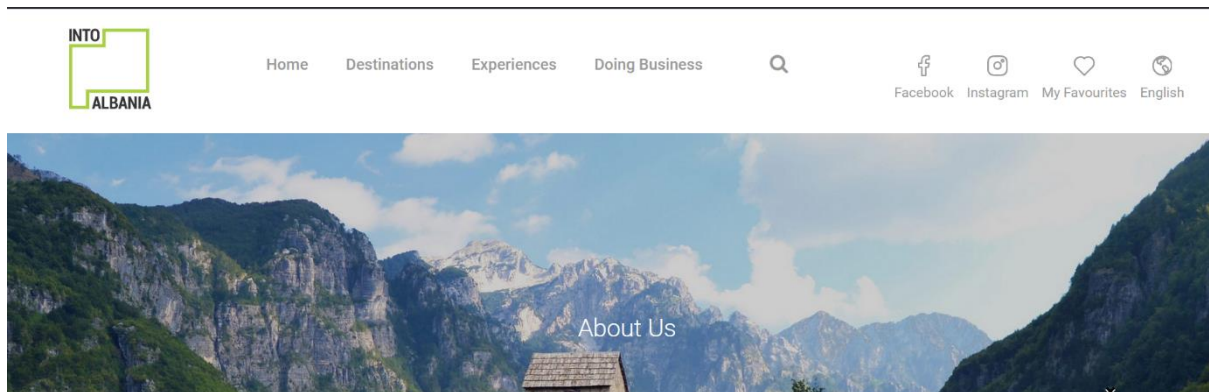


Fig 2.1 Screenshot from a cognate site.

As I was scrolling to find some information about the locations that I wanted to have in my website I couldn't find anything in one place. Just pieces of information that didn't give everything about certain places.

Tourism in Albania has been gaining momentum as a significant industry driven by the beautiful stunning landscapes historical sites and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, I will give some data and insights regarding the business and cultural context of the tourism in Albania.

Albania's tourism has experienced substantial growth in recent years (Fig 3.1). In 2019, it was recorded over 6 million tourist arrivals, marking a significant increase from previous years.

All data for Albania in detail

Year	Number of tourists	Receipts	% of GNP
2021	5.52 m	2.48 bn \$	13.83 %
2020	2.66 m	1.24 bn \$	8.2 %
2019	6.41 m	2.46 bn \$	15.96 %
2018	5.93 m	2.31 bn \$	15.21 %
2017	5.12 m	2.05 bn \$	15.75 %
2016	4.74 m	1.82 bn \$	15.35 %
2015	4.13 m	1.61 bn \$	14.17 %
2014	3.34 m	1.85 bn \$	13.98 %

Fig 3.1 World Data Info [Report](#)

Also, Albania has been gaining increased attention in European media and beyond in the recent years (Fig 3.2). While it may have been less well-known as a tourist destination in the past now there is a growing popularity.

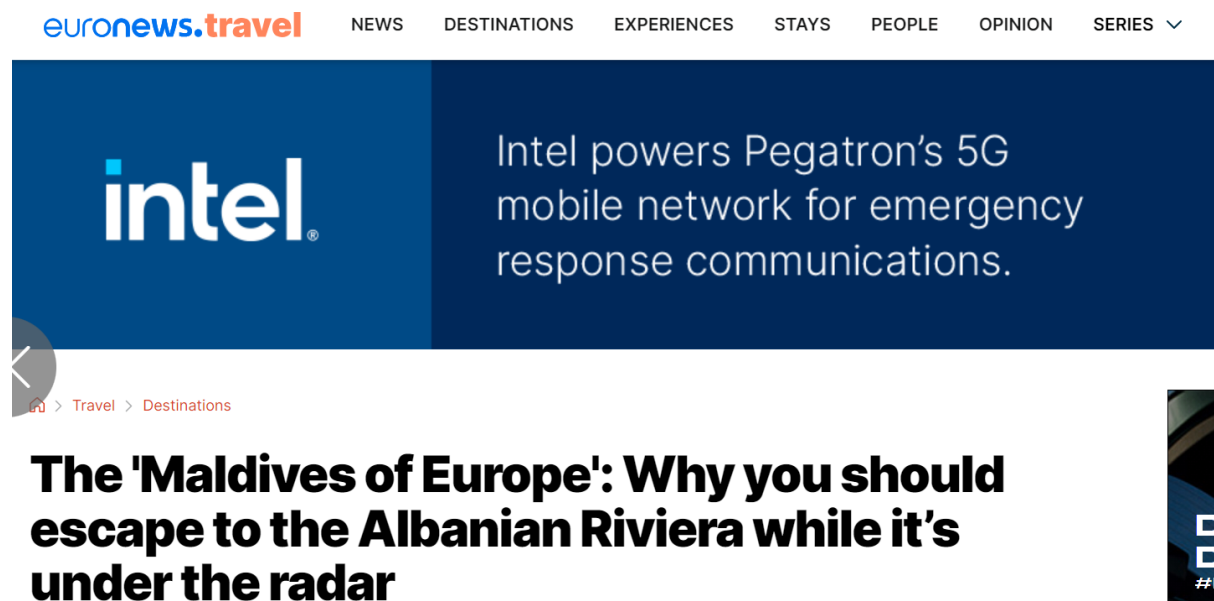


Fig 3.2 [Euronews](#) article

As it is seen the number of tourists every year in Albania is increasing and the main reasons are the beautiful landscapes and scenery that tourists find there. Mermaid of Balkans initially will try to give a glimpse from the hidden places in the coastline and provide the tourists with essential information to locate those places.

What came as a vague idea now is becoming a very rewarding and inspiring for the future of this project. As I have mentioned earlier in the report, I love to visit hidden and quiet places, and this is the main motivation behind this initiative. But what started as a very general idea it progressed into a special project that has affected my personal growth and development.

Giving a short explanation about the meaning of the name and how it relates to this project. Mermaid represents something hidden and mysterious exactly as those destinations are for most of the tourists. And on the other side Balkans which is the region that Albania is located.

4. Commodity

UX Design

User Experience Design is a fundamental part of creating a product that will give the user an amazing experience when using the designed product. Since the main goal of every designer is to create a great product for your user, that makes the UX process very important, and the development of this process goes through stages that are essential for a successful outcome on the end.

When I started the studies for Web Design and Content planning, I had no idea that the most important aspect of creating a website is firstly thinking about the user. The workshops with Steph and Chris really gave me another insight of what a successful product creation could be. And the most important aspect is how it helped me to choose the topic for the Major Project. In the beginning I was trying to find a great idea about the project and when I introduced those ideas, I was unable to answer the most important question which is “What is the problem that you are trying to solve?”. From these workshops I learned that we should be looking to find a good problem and not a great idea.

Following the decision on the Major Project topic the most important steps that I will follow are User Research from the

first workshop we conducted and User Experience Design from the second workshop. By taking the results of the planning and development of the research I will apply them to design my website.

User Research (Steph's workshop)

During the workshop we covered the fundamentals of user research which includes what is and why do we need user research, setting research objectives, methodology, writing good research questions and analysing the data from research. To understand and learn some skills that we need when designing our website, we practiced research in class with a topic given to us by Steph.

Research objectives help us state a clear goal of what we are trying to achieve, and it serves as a guide in designing the research and serves as an instrument for the team to align on research outcomes. In addition, it helps determine the appropriate methodology to conduct the research.

User research seeks to understand users' relationships with products and services in real contexts. And understand the people's needs which helps create a good product. Following the understanding of people's needs you create a product for your users with a promise and you understand if your product is successful in keeping that promise. For the research moving forward we need to clearly state assumptions and hypothesis. Hypothesis defines what we expect to see, and the goal of the research is to determine whether it is wrong or right.

Additionally, we learned about usability testing which is defined by five components that include learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction. Learnability is defined by how easy is for the user to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design. Efficiency is a measure of how quickly they perform tasks once they have

learned the design. Memorability is measured by how quickly they re-establish proficiency after a period of not using it. Errors frequency and severity: how often users make errors while using the system, how serious the errors are and how fast they recover from them. And lastly is subjective satisfaction if the user likes using the design.

One of the most important parts is how do we interview the user and what are the points to consider when conducting an interview.

User Experience Design (Chris' workshop)

On the workshop with Chris, we learned the fundamentals of User Experience Design. The first concept was User-centered design (UCD) which is an iterative design process in which the designers focus on the users and their needs in each phase of the design process.

UCD calls for involving users throughout the design process via a variety of research and design techniques to create highly usable and accessible products for them. And the successful product sits at the centre of these three criteria:

- Business (viability) a design that will be successful.
- User (desirability) a design that people want or need.
- Technology (feasibility) a design that can be easily created with new or existing technology.

Together these three criteria create the ideal conditions for innovation and that is why research is essential and reviewing the ideas early in the research to determine if they meet the criteria mentioned above.

Following the research, we start the process of analysing and synthesis of the data. All the data collected from the user research is to be analysed which basically is the process of

classifying, organising, and transforming that data into valuable information and better yet a conclusion. After analysing the data synthesis is the process from which we conclude insights and key findings that can be used to make an impact on decisions.

The next phase was to visualise the findings that we had to this point. We did that using some techniques that Chris explained to us and we also practiced at class:

- **User Personas:** User Personas are the users of your product, and they help define the target audience.
- **User Journey Maps:** User Journey Maps visually structure the knowledge of a potential user and how they experience a service.
- **Empathy Maps:** Empathy maps help us gain a deeper understanding of the user.

During the whole process of accumulating and analysing the data taken from research we have distinguished some possible statements which will help provide a solution. We used the technique “How might we...?” which helps find and define our design focus.

The first phase of the double diamond process included research and analysing and the second part after having completed the research phase is creating using all the knowledge and insight from the first part. What we learned is that the best technique to start the process of creating the design is sketching. We divided the process in eight sketches that made part of the finished design. The sketches don't need to be aesthetic, and the process was very messy because the time limit was very short. The process was repeated twice, and the reason was to push ideas in new direction. The principles used were Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, put to other uses, Eliminate, Rearrange. All serving the purpose of improving the final design.

UX Design (Major Project)

The first step for the UX design is identifying what problem does the website solve?

Many hidden or less-known beaches in Albania are not well documented in popular travel guides or websites. Tourists often miss out on these beautiful less-crowded destinations.

The solution that the site offers is:

Display all the hidden beaches of Albania that are accessible by boat and display where they are located.

Research Objectives

Following the process that I was taught in the UX design workshops I decided to state my research objectives for my major project. My chosen research objectives are:

- Identify positive and negative experiences when locating a travel destination in order to create the best option for the users.
- Understand interaction of the users with the website while they might be traveling to a certain place.
- Gain insights on the experience the users might have after using the website.
- Distinguish opportunities to make my website particular and unique even if there are many websites with travel content.

I would argue that the process of stating research objectives is flexible because the process of research is much longer, and we must be ready to learn and define during and after having carried out the research.

Target Audience

My target audience includes international and native tourists who plan to spend their summer vacation in Albanian coast. Since most travellers are adults the age range is from 18- 60 and possibly tourists who use technology to research and plan their vacations. Some factors that influence the target audience is the budget for their holiday, how much time they plan on spending and if the user wants to explore different destinations.

User Personas and Design Process

User personas are the potential users of the website. When creating the user personas for my website an essential part was analysing my target audience. In the description of the user personas, I included name, age, nationality, and technology. I also included stories and possible pain points in order to make clear the problems for me to provide a solution for the user.

After creating the user personas, I started to research and conclude the best solution for the problem. One of Chris' steps in the workshop was create a few "How might we...?" statements and then reframe the problem in a single statement.

Some of the statements I created during the process:

- How might we provide information to international tourists about tourist destinations in the Albanian coast?
- How might we help users easily locate their chosen destination?
- How might we give the user a better experience of using the website during the journey?

User Personas

The user personas that I have created belong to different potential tourists that could use the website.

User Personas

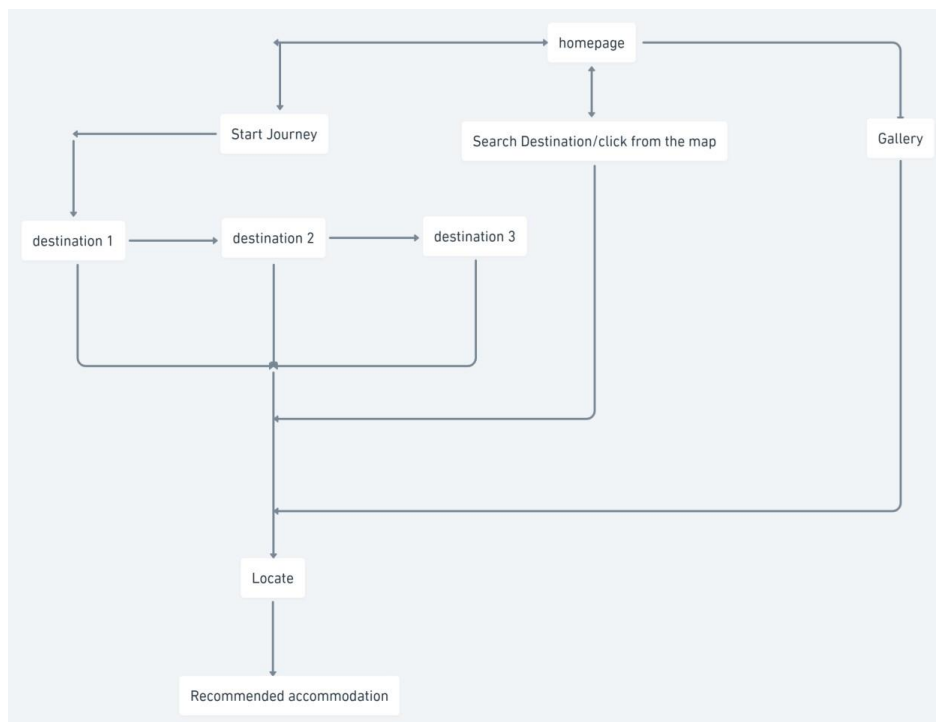


Fig 4.2 Revised Information Architecture

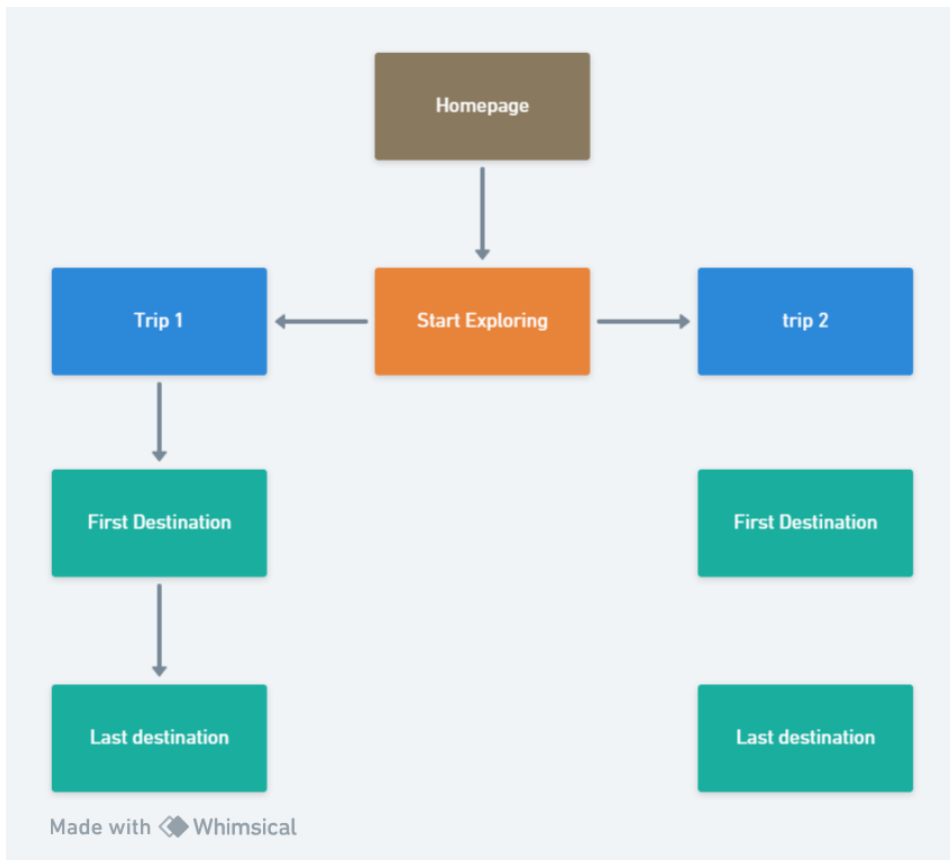


Fig 4.2 Revised Information Architecture

5. Delight

The overall design of the site is strongly related to the brand identity. Overall, the elements that affect the brand image are the logo, layout, typography, and colours. I was very particular in choosing very simplistic elements because of my lack of experience in design in general. And that made it easier for me to avoid mistakes. But I intend to work on that part with the future projects and designs because I have found to love design and making things work together. For this reason, what before scared me now is a very satisfying challenge that would gladly work in the future.

Furthermore, what I understood with this project and with the overall course is that creating good design takes a lot of time and effort. I came to realise this only after working for a long time with the logo for the site. Since is the design bit that I have worked more recently because of the change I made in changing the name. Earlier in this report I explained the logo and its meaning, now I will continue to the design of the logo.

The first challenge for me was to figure a way to include the logo in the mobile viewport. After a lot of struggles and practice I decided to write the logo in two rows. The mermaid more emphasised and the second part below. In the beginning I had this idea of only including the first part in the mobile design. But later, I realised that that is not good practice to remove that important part of content.

To design the logo, I used illustrator. One of my biggest fears because I had spent more time trying to find the best tutorial that would help me learn how to design a logo until I had no more time left. As a result, I realised that I needed to start using it to become better. Regardless I started to look for fonts that would best suit the name of the site. After some research I decided on Cinzel Decorative (Fig 4.1). This font

gives the name an elegant and timeless appearance that is appropriate for the mermaid as an elegant creature.

Regular 400

MERMAID OF BALKANS

Fig 4.1 Cinzel Decorative Google Font

Nevertheless, I decided to give a little more personality and uniqueness to the logo and that is where I came up with the idea to add the tail to the letter M in the name (Fig 4.2). That was a small tweak and very easy to work on illustrator. In the end the letter is also used as a favicon in WordPress.



Fig 4.2 Favicon logo

In the logo of the site the 'mermaid' is in a larger font and the 'of Balkans' is in a smaller font size and sits below (Fig 4.3).



Fig 4.3 Logo

As for the layout of the site its aligned with the overall design. Simplistic and minimalistic with a consistency throughout the site. In the centre of the design are the images. Which are displayed in polaroid boxes (Fig 4.4). That is to make the images pop but as well because the photos are very raw and represent a memory. In the content part with the paragraph, I describe the locations from a personal point of view and the images align with that.

After spending ample time immersed in the awe-inspiring scenery of the cove, our excitement reached its peak as we prepared to take a refreshing swim. Swimming had been the highlight of our visit, and we couldn't wait to immerse ourselves in the pristine, crystal-clear waters. It was akin to stepping into a natural swimming pool, but on an entirely different scale. Despite the depth of the waters, we leaped from the boat, relishing every moment of the experience. I'd advise anyone who isn't a confident swimmer to exercise caution and always wear a flotation vest to ensure their safety in this enchanting aquatic paradise.

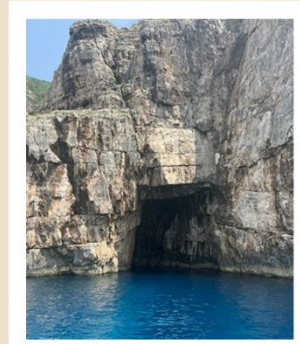
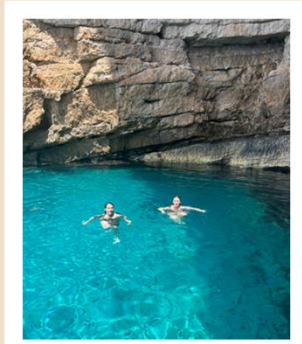


Fig 4.4 Layout design

Fonts

Apart from the logo I choose very classic and simple fonts for the site. With headings in Playfair Display (Fig 4.5) and body text in Fira Sans (Fig 4.6). Two classic typefaces that go very well with each other. I wanted a classy font for the headings and a serif font is very appropriate, and of course prioritizing legibility but also adding a playfulness to the text I chose a sans serif font like Fira Sans.

Regular 400

Turquoise Cave

Fig 4.5 Heading Font (Playfair Display)

After spending ample time immers

Fig 4.6 Body Font (Fira Sans)

Colours

Choosing a colour palette is very important because it influences user perception, emotions, and overall website usability (Fig 4.7). The colours chosen to represent the concept and the brand identity of the site:



CYAN-BLUE



DARK RED



OFF-WHITE

Fig 4.7 Colour Palette

Cyan-blue (#08949F)

A bright and vibrant blue with a hint of cyan, often described as a teal or turquoise. I used one of the images from the destinations in the site using illustrator. After many attempts to choose the most vibrant colour and incorporating it in the site this was the best result that combined very well with the other colours.

Dark Red (#a63105)

A warm colour that has a lot of intensity and strength. I have mainly used for the call-to-action button and for other small details to add more playfulness and fun. It's like a fiery sunset colour and has a strong contrast from the rest of the site.

Off-white (#a63105)

It's a neutral and light colour with warm undertones. I have used this colour for the background. It has a warm sandy colour, and it fits the colour palette. Also doesn't overpower the images all the contrary it makes them more visible.

Finding a colour that fits the concept of the site is very important. In the site I have incorporated this colour palette to create a beach design. In the header I have just included all the three colours just to include the blue of the sky and the sun. The body is the sand and the coast and then in the footer is the sea with its beautiful turquoise hue.

6. Firmness

For the development of a successful website, it is necessary the integration of various elements and technologies. In the technologies used for the site are included the domain name, the web hosting company and all the tools that I used to create content and important features for the website.

Domain Registrar and Web Hosting

Starting with domain name that is not only a merely a technical necessity but also critical element for online branding and accessibility strategy (Fig 6.1). It was important to create a relevant and memorable domain name not only to establish a strong online identity but also to enhance user engagement and search engine optimisation (SEO) efforts. I choose GoDaddy as a domain registrar. When using the domain registrar platform, I found it to be user-friendly and easy to learn. That enabled me to easily manage and ensure the connection with the webhost.

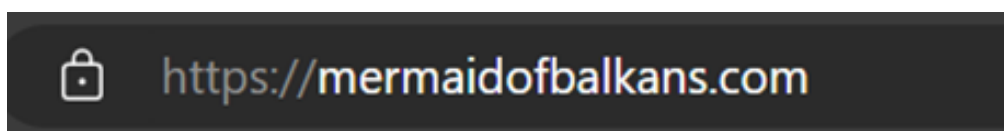


Fig 6.1 Domain name

Additionally, for the webhosting company I chose Siteground. That was the most recommended platform to host a WordPress site from the industry. Because of a very good customer service I am very pleased that I choose siteground and that is one of the most important things that I learned. It was very easy to learn and navigate especially the site tools. As for the WordPress administration it was the same as what I had been used to earlier in the year. The main reason why I

choose a different hosting platform than Clook, what we had used during the course, was because I wanted to explore more and work with different platforms.

Wordpress Theme

The content management system that I use for the development of the site is WordPress. Considering the amount of content that I had planned initially for the site made it appropriate to use WordPress instead of building a CMS. Also learning WordPress was a personal goal considering that it's the most used CMS for the websites.

I was happy that I had chosen WordPress because later with the content creation I reduced even more the amount of content because I couldn't do more than one trip to produce more content.

To create a website with a unique design it was essential to build a WordPress theme from scratch. To build the theme I have used HTML and CSS for the front-end and PHP for the back end. In the initial stage of building the theme I have watched a series called the [WordPress 101](#) by Alessandro Castellani. And later after the initial stage I used the Vanilla Theme that was made available for us during the course.

Mapbox

To display the location of each destination I used Mapbox. A very good addition to the list of skills learned using this project. Integration with JavaScript enabled the display of the geographic information, routing enriching the user experience with valuable location-based featured.

Adobe photoshop

Adobe Photoshop, a powerful image editing and design software, played a pivotal role in optimizing and enhancing the images featured on the website. This versatile tool allowed us to resize, crop and load efficiently. High-quality images are integral to enhancing user experience and visual aesthetics.

7. Prototype

The design of the website, including its layout and content distribution, has been meticulously crafted based on the prototype presented during the prototype crit. The layout is thoughtfully structured, featuring a minimalist design with a primary focus on images for the user's engagement.

I have developed a Figma prototype to visualize the website's design, and I invite you to explore it [[here](#)](Figma prototype link). In essence, the actual website closely resembles the prototype, with the exception of the homepage, which is still undergoing refinement.

The defining feature of the website is the use of Polaroid-style images. These images not only contribute to an aesthetically pleasing layout but also serve as authentic representations of moments captured naturally. They showcase the raw beauty of various angles, evoking the essence of memory photography.

It's important to note that this style aligns with my photography skills at the beginner level. Rather than professional shots, the emphasis is on the genuine and unfiltered moments, making it a unique and personal photographic journey.

Prototypes serve as the backbone of effective web design. They are not just preliminary drafts; they are the visual blueprints that guide the entire development process. A well-crafted prototype allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the website's layout, user flow, and functionality before the actual development phase begins. It acts as a powerful tool for communication and collaboration, ensuring that the vision is clearly understood by all stakeholders. Furthermore, prototypes offer the flexibility to iterate and refine the design

based on feedback, ultimately resulting in a user-centric and polished end product. In essence, the prototype is the cornerstone upon which successful web design is built, providing a solid foundation for creativity, functionality, and user satisfaction.

8. Implementation

Content

Creating content is the first and most important part for the development of the website. During the course we learned and worked on a content first approach. It was the content that shapes and gives meaning to every design. The content for the website had to be collected and written. The core of the website are hidden destinations and to collect the data that I needed I had to travel and later produce content. That made it difficult to start creating content very soon and took me a long time to plan and visit the places.

Additionally having very little experience in creating this type of content was taking a lot of my time from the project work. But as it was one of the most important parts and the reason why we are using a content management system in the first place I knew that concentrating on the content was very important. And as I have mentioned before as well the site has data and written content.

The main parts of content included on the website are images and location. This part of the content was collected during the trips and then later I wrote about the experience and the description of the destinations. This was the part that took me more time. The description go hand in hand with the images to illustrate and convey meaning through them and the latitude and longitude are used to display the location in a Mapbox map.

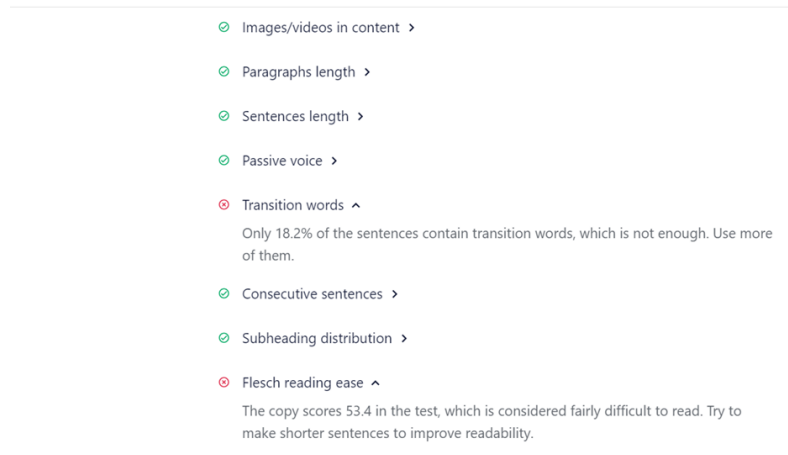
Firstly, to start with the most important part of the content which is photography. The photos in the site are photos taken with an iPhone camera and most of them in a portrait mode. The first mistake to make in the photography content. As it could be expected, since I had no experience on travel photography, I did some research on it but a small and important detail that I had missed was to take beautiful

landscape images. Although I had some landscape images there wasn't enough so that I could display those for every destination. For that reason, I have used mostly portrait images in the posts. After that for the homepages I manipulated the images in photoshop to create some different dimensions for the images.

The amount of content that is included on the website up to this point is not completely what I had planned initially. In the plan I had three trips and the destinations for each trip. I ended up doing just one of the trips initially planned and that was because the time that it took me to develop the website itself. After having all the data needed to create the minimum viable product, I started working on several parts of the site development. And with the difficulties that I had with the WordPress theme I slowed down on the content production and dedicated more time to other parts.

In addition, with content creation I used a plugin to understand and improve the SEO of the site. The SEO plugin was very important to write high quality content and it helped me improve the content that I was creating with clear indication on what I could improve (Fig 5.1).

Text alternative for the images also improve the search engine optimisation (SEO) by providing descriptive content that search engines can index and rank, enhancing discoverability.



Post

Fig 5.1 AIOSEO plugin

Dynamic Content

When I started working on developing the site, I was trying to take every decision for the website as a web designer who is working for a client. What that meant was that all the back-end work was invisible to the client and all the work that I was doing had to make it easier for the client. In other words, in some pages, I wanted content to be dynamic and not rewrite repetitive content in many pages.

So, the first dynamic content part is in the page that holds all the posts from the same categories (Fig 5.2). In that page the posts are updated whenever a post is added on WordPress from the same category. This is the same for all the categories created in WordPress.



Fig 5.2 Posts page from one category

Continuing with dynamic content there is also the page that holds all the categories which is the trips page (Fig 5.3). Every time that I add a new category its automatically added in that page. The only thing that I couldn't achieve and that I worked for a long time is that every time I add a new category, I have to create a template that displays the trips.

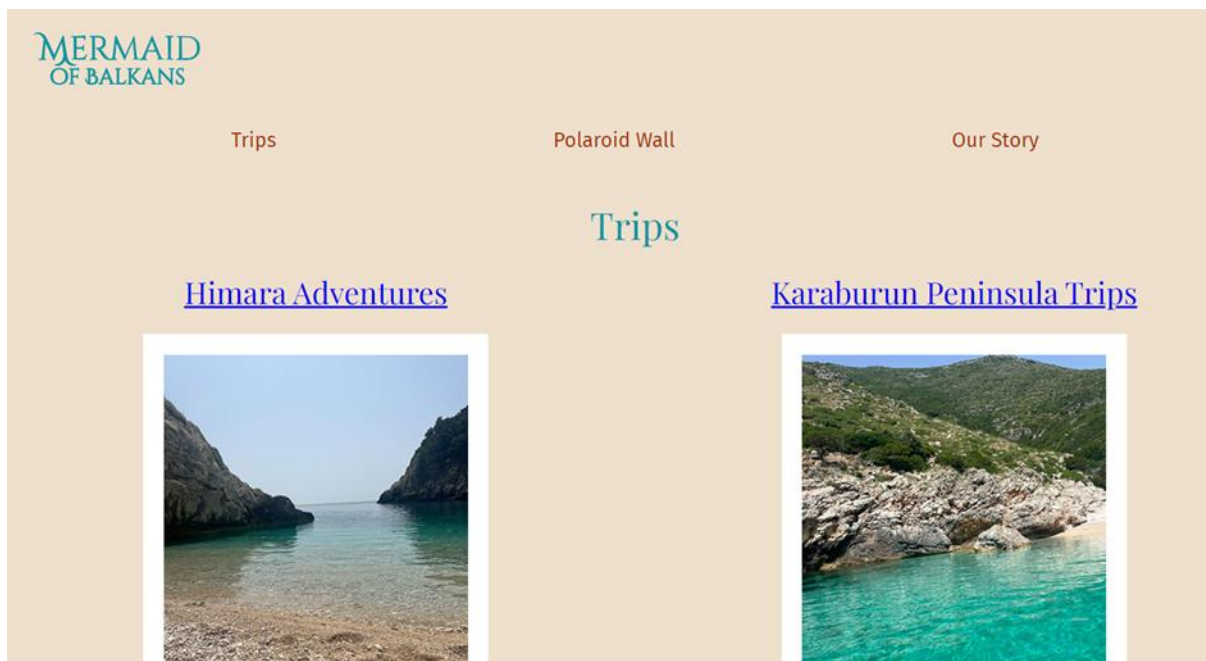


Fig 5.3 Category page

MapBox

For the implementation of the map on the website I have used a combination of functions, JavaScript, and short codes that I have implemented as html bits in the WordPress posts (Fig 5.4).

Location

```
[mapbox_map destination_name="Turquoise Cove"]
```

This Mapbox map displays the location of Turquoise Cave using satellite imagery.

Fig 5.4 The use of shortcode in the WordPress editor.

To implement this code in the posts I have used functions in the 'function.php' file (Fig 5.5). The function renders the map dynamically based shortcode attributes and post meta data. In the shortcode attribute is generated the name and then the post meta data that is the latitude and longitude is given in the form custom fields in WordPress (Fig 5.6).

```
37 // shortcode function
38
39 function render_mapbox_map($atts) {
40     $latitude = get_post_meta(get_the_ID(), 'latitude_field', true);
41     $longitude = get_post_meta(get_the_ID(), 'longitude_field', true);
42     $destination_name = isset($atts['destination_name']) ? $atts['destination_name'] : '';
43
44     ob_start();
45     ?>
46     <div class="ratio">
47         <div class="map-container" data-latitude="<?php echo esc_attr($latitude); ?>" data-longitude="<?php echo esc_attr($
48             longitude); ?>" data-destination-name="<?php echo esc_attr($destination_name); ?>"></div>
49     </div>
50     <?php
51     return ob_get_clean();
52 }
53 add_shortcode('mapbox_map', 'render_mapbox_map');
```

Fig 5.5 The shortcode function

Custom Fields

Name	Value
footnotes	
latitude_field	19.309783
longitude_field	40.40515

Fig 5.6 The post meta data.

I choose these methods because it allows for dynamic content. It retrieves the latitude, longitude, and destination name from the shortcode and the post meta data enabling to display maps for different locations with ease. Also using a shortcode provides a user-friendly way for the content creator to include maps in the posts or pages. By simply adding the [mapbox_map] with the destination name the content creator can display maps without complex coding. Furthermore, this function ensures consistency across the website. It makes the process and the appearance of the map standard which creates a seamless user experience.

W3W

Also, to enhance the user experience and provide precise location information I have added a What3words (W3W) addresses as part of the data from the trips together with the latitude and longitude.

This W3W address provides a simple and accurate way to pinpoint specific points, down to a 3m x 3m square. This level of precision is very important especially for this project because the destinations are very close to each other and this way each location can be distinguished more precisely.

Also, another important fact about W3W addresses is that they work globally, covering both urban and remote areas. This ensures that users can access accurate location regardless of their location.

Accessibility

In this course we have learned about the importance of accessibility. Accessibility on the website ensures that the content produced in the websites is available and usable by all individuals, regardless of disabilities or impairments. Besides an accessible website enhances the user experience for everyone.

As a first project with a different approach from what we used during the year I would say that the project faces some limitations even with the best effort in mind when starting the development. Below I will show both the limitations and the accomplishments in terms of accessibility.

I will first start with the most important part of the content that is images. I have provided a text alternative to every image in the site, and this ensures that users with visual impairments can access and understand the content that relies on non-text elements. As I have mentioned earlier this beneficial for search engine optimisations enhancing discoverability.

To continue with JavaScript although there is not an alternative way to render the mapbox without Javascript I have provided a short description that informs the user about the map in the absence of the content of the map.

There are skip to main content and skip to navigation link in every page to ensure that users can skip to the main parts of the website. And another part is that this site has been build with a mobile first approach. This begins with a layout for screens that begin with a minimum screen width of 320px.

To continue with the other part, I will start first off with explaining the limitation in terms of accessibility. Trying to learn using the WordPress editor for the content and exploring with the blocks in those elements made me oversee some mistakes in terms of the order they should be. In some instances, I have broken the rules that may result in

disadvantage for users with impairments. Of course, as I unknowledge these limitations there is a second phase that will be more about reflecting on the work done, where I could improve some elements. But for now, with the time left to complete everything I will leave that for a second phase.

9. Analysis Report

Traffic

When trying to put in the report the data about the traffic in my site I took data from the plugin installed in the WordPress as I mentioned earlier. Considering the timeframe since this plugin was installed the metrics collected belong to the last two months.

Below you will find the analytics for the sessions measuring user interaction with the website (Fig 7.1). This is the data for the last 30 days and the results are different in different times. As its obvious in the graphic the user interaction with the site is not constant and, in some days, reaches a very high number and in some it's in lower levels.



Fig 7.1 User interaction with the site

The pageviews graphic measures the user engagement in the site with particular pages (Fig 7.2). The graphic shows the same curve with the pageviews as well, where in some parts is higher and then other days is lower.



Fig 7.2 User engagement with the site

Analysing the session duration represents the length of time the user remains active on a website during a session and the average is 49s (Fig 7.3). On average this is a relatively short period of time the users spend on the site but considering that the website is just recently launched, and the content is still not complete that's a good indication.

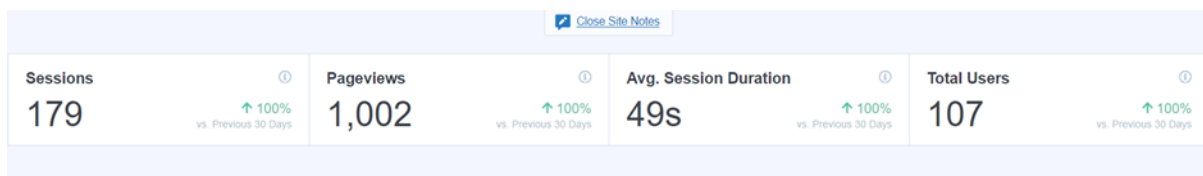


Fig 7.3 Average session duration

The site in the course of one month has had 107 distinct users which indicates that website is reaching a diverse audience.

To grow further the user base, I am implementing social media marketing and draw more users to the site.

According to the data provided from the analytics the number of the new visitors is 100% and the number of the returning users is 0% (as you will notice below) (Fig 7.4). This is for the fact that the site is relatively new, and it has a higher proportion of new visitors initially.

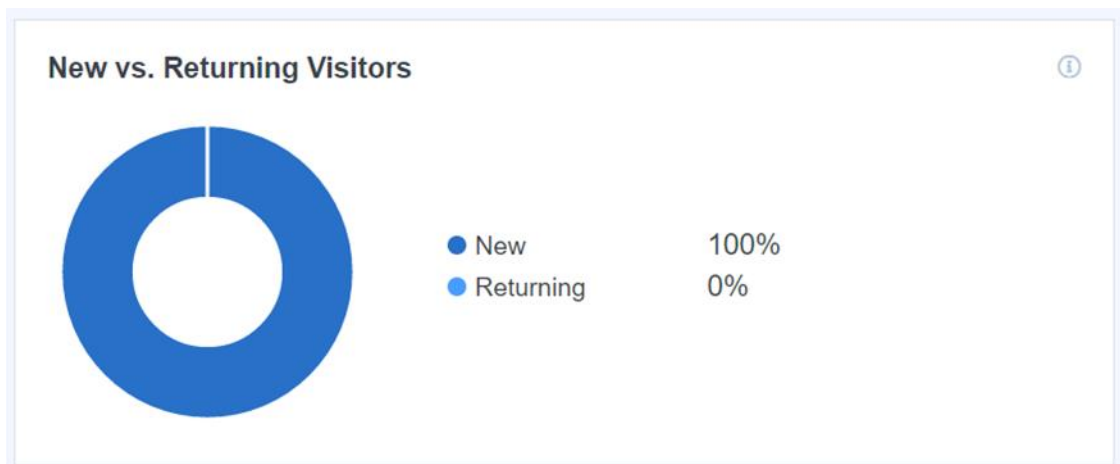


Fig 7.4 Bounce Rate

To continue with how users access the site the data given shows that the most used way is through desktop with 57% and the second most used device is the mobile with 43% (Fig 7.5). We notice that the use of Tablet devices is zero. As the user behaviour is yet to be analysed in the future this first data that is collected is still experimental and is yet to change as more content is added to the site.

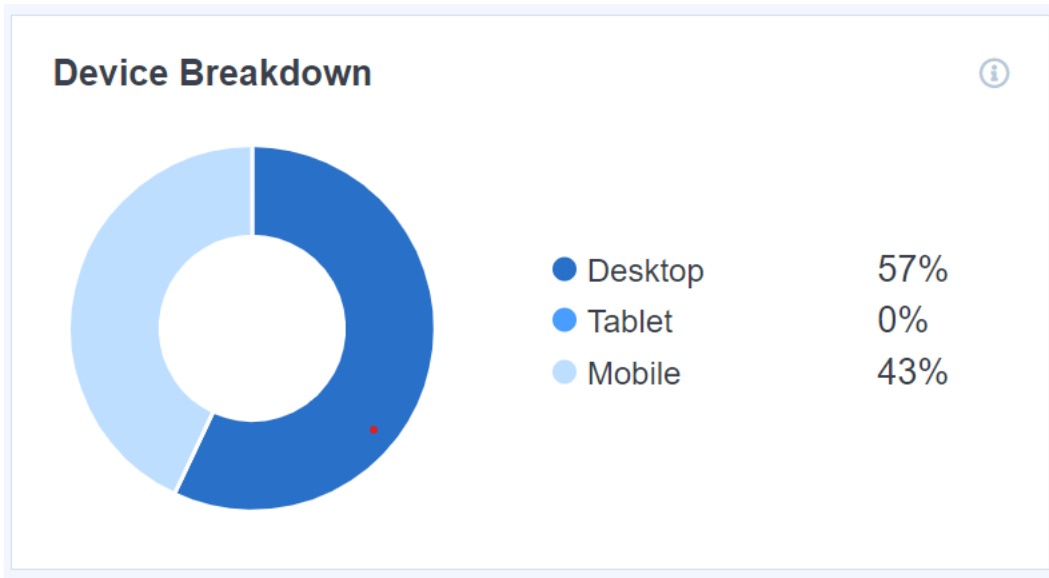


Fig 7.5 Device Breakdown

Below I will include the graphic that shows the countries that the users are accessing the site from (Fig 7.6). The geographic location of your website users provides valuable insights for tailoring content, marketing efforts, user experience, and business strategies to better meet the needs and preferences of your diverse audience, ultimately enhancing engagement and driving success.

The figure is a table titled "Top 10 Countries" with an information icon in the top right corner. It lists the top 10 countries by user count, including their respective flags and the number of users.

Rank	Country	User Count
1.	United Kingdom	121
2.	Ireland	40
3.	Albania	8
4.	United States	8
5.	India	1
6.	Saudi Arabia	1

Fig 7.6 Countries that users of the site are located.

Social Media Marketing

Continuing with the social media marketing in the site that obviously can serve the increase in traffic.

Mostly because I am not a user of social media myself it was a little difficult to think about how I am going to incorporate marketing strategies to increase traffic in my site. As one of the most used platforms for photography I choose Instagram to be the only social media linked to the site.

I started the marketing campaign with just one post and plan to add a lot more as I have a lot of content in forms of photography and videos ready to upload (Fig 7.8).

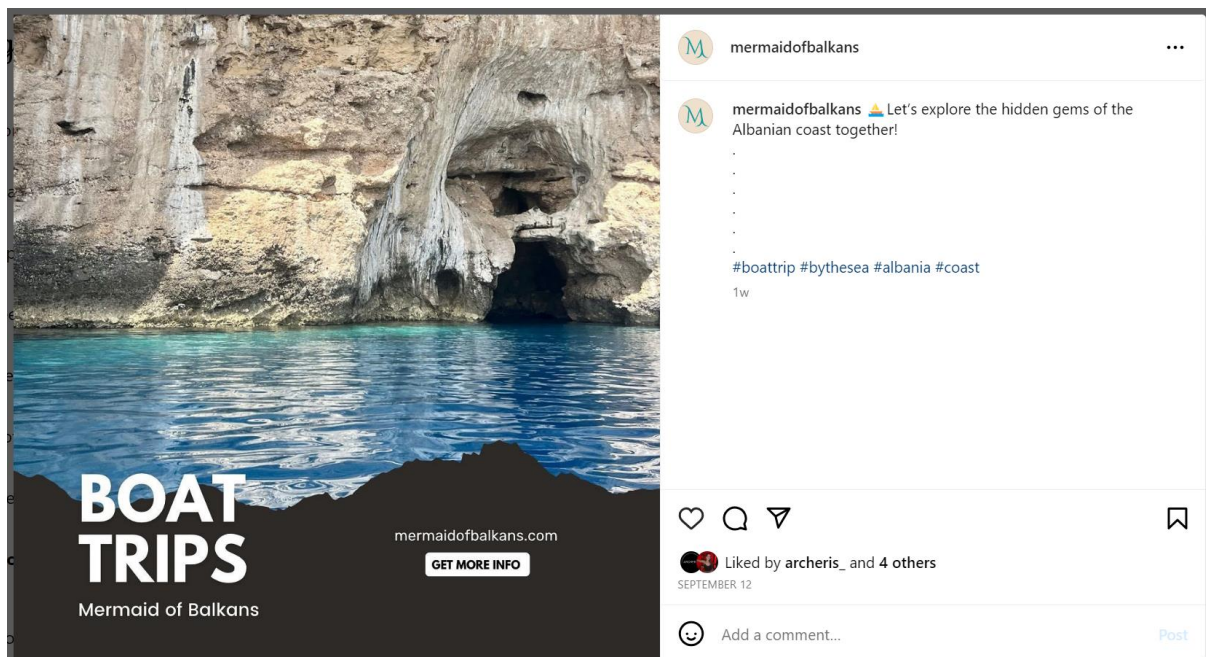


Fig 7.7 Instagram post to promote the website.

I have created an account with the logo as a profile and that account has already started to get noticed (Fig 7.8). Although during this time the social media hasn't been a priority, I will continue to promote the project to increase traffic and use of the website.

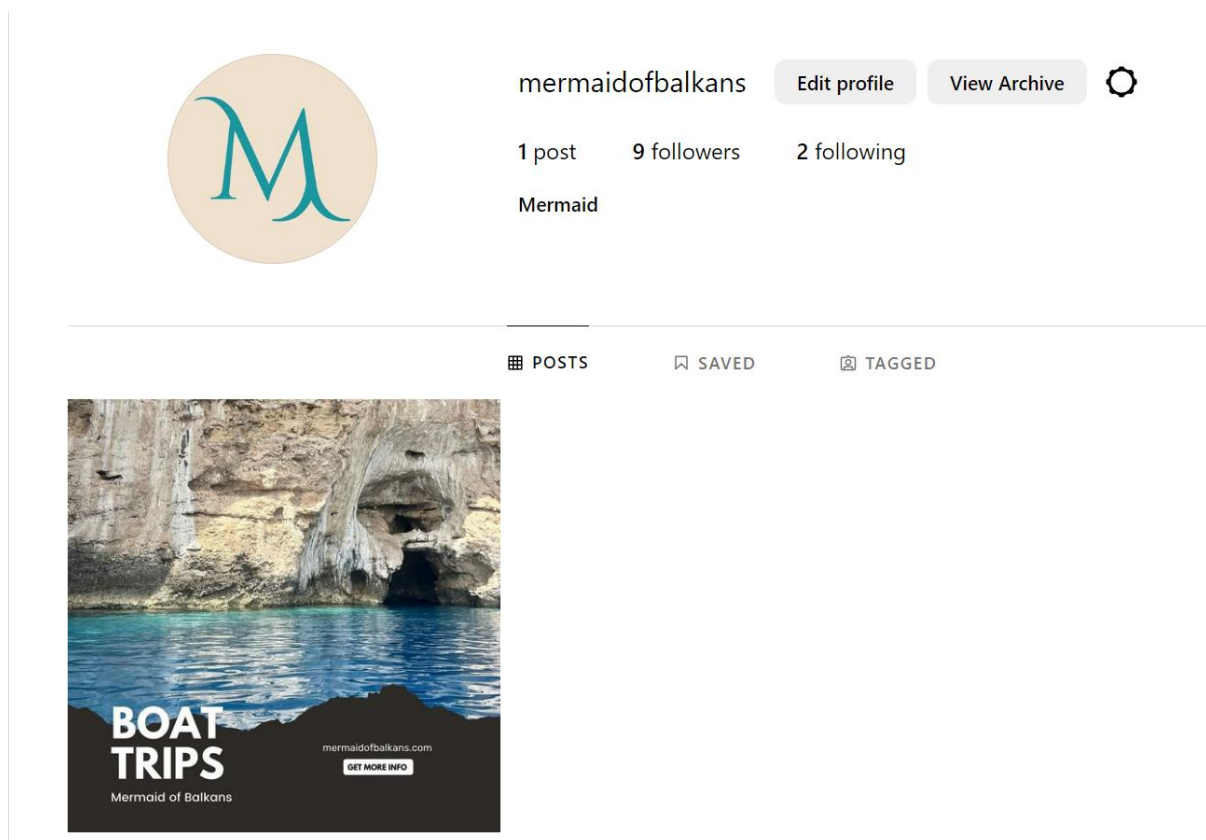


Fig 7.7 Instagram profile.

10. Conclusion

Mermaid of Balkans is a website intended for tourists that travel to Albania and would like to discover a bit more about the beautiful Mediterranean beaches and coves of Albania. It is a guide with descriptions from the point of view of a tourist

(me), location and raw unedited images that showcase the natural wonder of these areas.

As said previously the content for the site is based in three main pillars. That is description, location with a map display in the site and raw images. All these images and other forms of content are collected and created by me. I collected exact location while I was on the trip and took the photos with a simple iPhone camera.

Reflecting on this project that is the product of a year long journey I would say that for me it has been a very rewarding experience. We started with a simple concept to then evolve to a unique and beautiful idea.

What I first learned from this project is that the design process is not something that happens overnight, but it takes time and is an ongoing effort. We created design ideas through a process of researching, reflecting from feedback and then practicing. Although there are a lot of limitations to the project that I am aware of the work done till this point is very rewarding.

The work for the major project was a challenge because of the different approach that we had compared to what we had learned prior to the major project. But it was essential to deepen the knowledge of web design and to practice what we will be working on the industry.

This project has proven to be invaluable with all the learning and the new skills developed during this process. Starting from the first stage to the design stage and the implementation it has been a very rewarding experience. I have put to practice all that I was learning during a year and understood how the process of implementing a successful website is. Of course, with a lot of limitations, trials and errors.

THANK YOU!

Mermaidofbalkans.com