



Series 7: Programme 5 (of 8) - 'Taking Off'

Making Waves – Portugal

Tourism plays a major part in Portugal's economy. Every year 12 million foreign tourists head to Portugal to take advantage of the good climate. Its fine beaches are also an attraction, but unfortunately many holidaymakers fail to recognise the dangers of the sea and its tidal currents. Around 30 people a year die in drowning accidents. If the tourism industry is to continue to boom visitors need to be safe. One initiative on Portugal's beaches is bringing safety to beach users and the lifeguards who look after them.



Holidaymakers enjoy the beach, but they are not always aware of the dangers.

The Healthy Beach Project

The Vodafone Portugal Foundation, working in collaboration with the National Maritime Authority, the Water Institute, the Nature Conservation Institute and the European Blue Flag Association, has funded the Healthy Beach Project with an investment of 1.5 million euros. The main aims of this project are to increase the safety level in bathing zones and contribute to environmental preservation, improving the quality of the beaches.

One of the problems in Portugal is the length of its beaches, which total over 500 kilometres. The beach lifeguards can patrol only parts of this area, so getting to a person in difficulties can take precious minutes. To assist the guards in making the beaches safer, Vodafone has supplied them with mobile phones. During the

Global System for Mobiles (GSM) is the international standard for wireless technology. GSM is a digital technology and therefore the call quality is of a very high standard. Calls are always clear and the network is very secure.

Virtual Private Network (VPN) allows private data to be shared through the use of a public telecommunication infrastructure. The idea of the VPN is to give users the same capabilities as public infrastructure, but at a much lower cost.

bathing season free GSM calls can be made between these mobile phones. There are prominent signs, some of which are in Braille, at the lifeguard stations on the beaches clearly displaying the emergency number. A VPN will be made available that will include all the lifeguard tower numbers, relevant emergency services and port authorities' numbers.

Once a guard has received an emergency call they can spring into action. The Foundation has donated 14 jet skis that have been specially adapted for this work. A special stretcher turns the jet ski into a water ambulance that can quickly bring an injured or exhausted person back to shore.



A specially adapted jet ski enables rescuers to bring people back on a stretcher.

"If someone was 200-300 metres away we had to swim and it took us a long time, 4-5 minutes depending on the lifeguard. Today, it's as easy as getting the jet ski running. Even with little experience and a rough sea we can reach the victim in a few seconds. Recently we had an accident with 22 people drowning at the same time; with the jet ski we were able to rescue 10 people, and the lifeguards picked up the rest." Daniel Vieira Meco, Lifeguard on Nazare Beach.



A Tiralos being used to enable a disabled person access to the beach and sea.

A major part of the initiative is to improve accessibility – special wheelchairs, Tiralos, have been designed to allow access for disabled people to travel across the sandy surface that would hamper ordinary wheelchairs. The Tiralos has a wide track, making it very stable, and its wheels are soft enough to give a comfortable ride, wide enough not to sink into the sand and light enough to float in the water.

As well as these health and safety measures, the project is also providing a range of environmental quality improvements. On beaches subscribing to the project, a campaign of environmental awareness is being promoted. Teams of

volunteer teenagers patrol the beaches looking out for any environmental problems. Information on the water quality, temperature and meanings of flags and tides is being produced and displayed on notice boards. Ashtrays and cigarette bins will be distributed in various places.

In the first year the project covered 64 bathing beaches, and this is planned to rise to 94 in the second year and 124 beaches in the final year. In total, over the three years from 2005 to 2007, the Foundation will supply the following services and equipment:

- 14 jet skis equipped with stretchers for carrying accident victims and 4 trailers;
- Fuel for the jet skis;
- 250 'Healthy Beach' signs;
- 250 mobile phones for lifeguard posts;
- GSM calls on Vodafone Portugal's network between these mobile phones during the bathing season;
- 85 information panels at the approaches to beaches, together with 45 panels in Braille;
- 125 ashtray dispensers;
- 200,000 ashtrays;
- 15,000 information posters;
- 20 amphibious wheelchairs (Tiralos);
- Access walkways to beaches for people with special needs;
- T-shirts and caps for the Lifeguard Programme.

In addition, the Vodafone Portugal Foundation is to provide 100,000 euros in general sponsorship for the Lifeguard Programme at bathing beaches organised by the European Blue Flag Association.

Further Information

Participating Organisations

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Blue Flag Association

The Blue Flag Association works towards sustainable development at beaches/marinas through strict criteria dealing with water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management, and safety and other services.

Website: www.blueflag.org

Blue Flag - Portugal Operator

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