

Sinfo

The Best from Slovenia

I FEEL
SLOVENIA

NR. 3 / 2020



I FEEL SLOVENIA

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EDITORIAL

Slovenia demonstrates in various areas and on a daily basis that excellence is an important foundation for achieving global competitiveness. Slovenians are creative, innovative, adaptable and live in harmony with nature. We see a crisis as an opportunity for new solutions, so periods when we are faced with the challenge of the unknown do not scare us. We are dealing with the problems raised by COVID-19 in the same way. Young, creative people are coming up with new entrepreneurial ideas, while our scientists are successfully applying themselves to the issues of the day.

And during these troubled times Slovenia remains a green, boutique destination, with many faces and features that can be explored indefinitely. For Slovenia, tradition is not only a connection to the past, but also a starting point for the future. In an increasingly connected and always online world, people are more and more drawn to peace, privacy and the quiet discovery and enjoyment of things that are not forced on us daily. In Slovenia you will feel welcome and at home. In addition to being a destination oriented towards sustainability and health, the country also offers world-class culinary delights, as recognized by the launch of a new Michelin guide, and stars for many of its restaurants.

Slovenia is also an equal and active partner on the diplomatic stage. This year's Bled Strategic Forum will discuss the Challenges and Opportunities in the Post-COVID-19 World; Neighbours – Regions – Global World: Partners or Rivals?. The country is also in the middle of intensive preparations for its Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The cover photo is by photographer Nina Petrovič who won the My Slovenia photography contest.

Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Executive Editor



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Neighbours – Regions – Global World:
Partners or Rivals?



Despite being one of the smallest European countries, Slovenia – thanks to its diversity – is one of the rare nations that can offer the most beautiful patchwork of different experiences.

FIVE IMPORTANT STORIES

MATEJA MALNAR ŠTEMBAL

IN FOCUS

SLOVENIA'S COMPETITIVENESS INCREASES

Slovenia ranked 35th among 63 countries, two places higher than last year, on the IMD's latest World Competitiveness Ranking. The study is based on statistical data from last year and previous years and also, to some extent, on a survey conducted among managers in March and April of this year.

Regarding government efficiency, Slovenia's institutional framework has improved compared to other countries, with progress having been made on the legal and regulatory frameworks. Regarding business efficiency, Slovenia's ranking increased with respect to finances. In this area, survey evaluations regarding corporate debt and the accessibility of financial sources are taken into consideration.

Slovenia also ranked relatively high in connection with the share of women in management, the efficiency of SMEs and training courses for employees.

As was the case in previous years, the main advantages of Slovenia remain its well-qualified and highly educated workforce, along with its reliable infrastructure.

187 PROJECTS WITH A TOTAL VALUE OF EUR 7.7 BILLION

Taking into consideration the third anti-corona package, in June the Slovenian Government compiled a list of important investments which should expedite the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. There are currently 187 ley investments amounting in total to about EUR 7.7 billion on the list, which will continue to be updated by the Government.

At present there are 22 environmental projects with a total value of EUR 310 million and 19 energy projects amounting to EUR 650 million on the list. Transport projects are valued at EUR 4.5 billion, while regional development projects, including in the areas of healthcare, education and culture, amount to more than EUR 2 billion.

INTACT CREDIT RATING

In mid-June, the American credit ratings agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) confirmed the AA- credit rating for the Republic of Slovenia.

According to the credit ratings agency, the economic prospects of the country have worsened because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Slovenia has put itself in a strong position with a decade of economic growth, deleveraging of the private sector and reducing the government debt-to-GDP ratio.

This should enable Slovenia to successfully combat the negative consequences of the pandemic without any long-term impacts on the credit rating.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS ARE AT HOME IN SLOVENIA

The Slovenian company Pipistrel's Velis Electro aircraft is the first fully electric aircraft in the world to obtain an EASA type certificate. The two-seater, intended primarily for training, is a game-changing aircraft in terms of technological innovations and cost-efficiency, and represents a breakthrough in the history of aviation. The EASA certification paves the way for a future of environmentally friendly aviation without emissions. Pipistrel is the only company in the world that currently has four different types of electric aircraft in production and for sale.

CELEBRATING 29 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

On 25 June, Slovenia celebrated its Statehood Day.

Twenty-nine years may only be a short period, but at the same time it is enough to make a few comparisons – what was the population of Slovenia at the time of gaining independence, and what is it today, how high are our wages, are we taking care of the environment, and so on.

1991	5,000 €	GDP (per capita)	22,983 €	2019	
1991	250 %	INFLATION (annual rate)	1.8%	2019	%
1991	2,000,000	POPULATION	2,089,310	2019	
1991	70 years	LIFE EXPECTANCY	78 years	2018	
2002	8.6 %	SEPARATE COLLECTION OF WASTE	71%	2018	
2000	115	NUMBER OF ORGANIC FARMS	3,320	2018	
1992	784,550	NUMBER OF VEHICLES	1,607,854	2019	
1991	less than 50%	ENROLMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL	82.7%	2020	
time taken to earn money to buy					
1991	27 minutes	BREAD (kg)	20 minutes	2019	
1991	16 minutes	FLOUR (kg)	6 minutes	2019	
1991	5 hours 2 minutes	COFFEE (kg)	1 hour 20 minutes	2019	
1991	46 minutes	OIL (l)	13 minutes	2019	

Source: SURS

I FEEL
SLOVENIA

Ambassador

GREEN. CREATIVE. SMART.

IN FOCUS

GREEN. CREATIVE. SMART.

AMBASSADORS FOR SLOVENIA'S ECONOMY

POLONA PREŠEREN

SLOVENIA BUILDS ITS COMPETITIVENESS BY STRATEGICALLY FOCUSING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IN NICHEs OF THE GREEN ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGIES, ROBOTISATION, MOBILITY, DIGITALISATION, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES. THE SLOVENIAN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING APPROACH: GREEN. CREATIVE. SMART. SLOVENIANS ARE A MOTIVATED PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT WORK IS AN IMPORTANT VALUE AND CREATIVITY IS A SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY.

Slovenian companies are focused on developing business models that enable growth without negative impacts on the environment. The economy is sustainable and directed towards users.

It offers creative, innovative and accessible solutions for people who support the long-term development of society.

Slovenian companies have distinguished themselves both at home and abroad through many successful and highly innovative products. We are pleased to highlight goods that are made in Slovenia.

GREEN. CREATIVE. SMART.

The Slovenian economy presents itself with the communication campaign Green. Creative. Smart. The objective of the campaign is the comprehensive and uniform promotion of the Slovenian economy on global markets; to that end, SPIRIT Slovenia, which is conducting the campaign, has selected 19 ambassadors – Slovenian companies and organisations – that will be followed by a further 20 companies in the second half of the year.

The main criterion for admission to the family of ambassadors of this national campaign for the promotion of the Slovenian economy was coming up with breakthrough solutions.

They thus demonstrate the key competitive advantages of the Slovenian economy as green, creative and smart. The ambassadors operate in a wide variety of fields – from metrology to synthetic fibre manufacturing, the production of LED mobile signs and software solutions, publishing, organic food production, house building, the aviation industry, and sports and sports equipment. This diversity paints a representative picture of the Slovenian economy.

AMBASSADORS

The family of ambassadors of the Slovenian economy includes very different companies – micro, small, medium-sized and large, start-ups, growing companies, and companies at the mature stage of development. They are also from all over Slovenia – from Primorje, Prekmurje, Gorenjska and southeast Slovenia. What they all have in common is that they are high-tech and highly sustainable companies whose innovative and smart solutions and high-quality products are the fruit of Slovenian know-how.

According to its director, Ajda Cuderman, SPIRIT Slovenia is working with the ambassadors to promote the competitiveness of Slovenian companies in the international environment: "Through the messages and activities of a broad digital marketing campaign, we will position the Slovenian economy in strategic export and investment markets as a trusted and reliable business environment. We expect a wide reach and even greater confidence in the Slovenian economy," she says, adding that "though Slovenia is a young country and has been using its I feel Slovenia national brand for only a little longer than 10 years, it has already become known for a growing number of success stories, including in the economy."

Various solutions have found their way onto the list of ambassadors for Slovenia's economy, such as the following:

Plastika Skaza: The Bokashi Organko 2 product is intended for household bio-waste disposal. It has been recognised as a ground-breaking and unique economic innovation representing the key competitive advantages of the Slovenian economy: green, creative, smart.



The Lumar active house is built in accordance with the "nearly zero energy" standards, which envisage a heat demand of less than 25 kWh/m2, very high energy efficiency, minimal operational energy requirements and a high proportion of renewables in the provision of the necessary operational energy.



"We are extremely proud to have become ambassadors for Slovenia's economy. Even though the majority of our products are exported abroad, Slovenia is the country where it all began and where the project and product were supported and well-received from the start," says a representative of the successful **EQUA** company.



Marko Lotrič, **Lotrič meroslovje, d.o.o.:** "The title of ambassador further encourages all our staff and is an excellent marketing opportunity for our company. We will absolutely strive to represent Slovenia in the best possible way in the field of metrology and measuring."



Ljubljanske mlekarne: "Being an ambassador will not only increase the international recognition that we hope to achieve through the promotional activities of SPIRIT Slovenia, but is also a way of confirming that we are going in the right direction in the domestic market. Apart from tasty products, consumers – our main and key target public – also expect producers to be socially responsible and adopt good business practices worthy of international attention."



SWARCO LEA: "Our innovative company follows a long-standing tradition of developing and manufacturing energy-saving and smart LED displays that are used along roadways. By being ambassadors in the Green. Creative. Smart. campaign, we wish to highlight the importance of Slovenian know-how in an international corporation with sustainable products and innovative, smart services."



SWARCO LEA

Panorganix: "Modern farming and food cultivation are an increasingly important link in the domestic economy. We are pleased to be chosen as an ambassador of the Slovenian economy. This suggests that others are also aware of the importance of high-quality, locally grown food and self-sufficiency for the future of us all," says Niko Miholič, Panorganix's sales manager.



Panorganix

Paradajz: "Becoming and being an ambassador of the Slovenian economy is a great recognition for us. We are particularly proud of the fact that we come from the primary agricultural production sector, which is usually considered a rather peripheral one. Our ranking among the ambassadors of the Slovenian economy confirms that agriculture, if you manage things correctly, can also be a sustainable industry with a high investment of knowledge and innovation," says a company representative.



Paradajz

Hooray Studios: "We never thought along the lines of if you're from little Slovenia, you can't make it, which is why being one of the ambassadors only gives us further drive to conquer the world," says Mic Melanšek, the company's creative and marketing director.



Hooray Studios

The following exceptional Slovenian companies and organisations that offer unique products and services with high added value in their respective fields were named ambassadors for Slovenia's economy: Akrapovič d.o.o., Alpina d.o.o., AquafilSLO d.o.o., Ekoart hiše d.o.o., Elan d.o.o., Equa d.o.o., Hooray Studios d.o.o., Ljubljanske mlekarne d.o.o., Lotrič meroslovje d.o.o., Luka Koper d.d., Lumar IG d.o.o., Mywater d.o.o., Nordijski center Planica, Panorganix d.o.o., Paradajz d.o.o., Pipistrel d.o.o., Plastika Skaza d.o.o., SETCCE d.o.o. and SWARCO LEA d.o.o.



IN FOCUS

Scientists across the world race to create a coronavirus vaccine.
Photo: simon-GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto

COVID-19 ALSO POSES A CHALLENGE TO SCIENTISTS SCIENTISTS AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CHEMISTRY IN LJUBLJANA WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO BEGIN LOOKING FOR A VACCINE

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CHEMISTRY, LJUBLJANA THEY BEGAN TESTING A COVID-19 VACCINE ON MICE IN MAY. THE VACCINE IS BASED ON NANOPARTICLES THAT REPRESENT THE VIRAL ANTIGEN. THEY THUS EXPECT TO SEE A BETTER RESPONSE THAN WITH A NORMAL PROTEIN.

The Slovenian research group is made up of biochemists, biotechnologists, molecular biologists, biologists, microbiologists, veterinarians and chemists, while they are also working with pharmacists, physicists and doctors.

They all possess wide-ranging knowledge, suitable equipment, and skilled and motivated colleagues. The head of the research project is the biochemist Dr Roman Jerala.

In an interview he emphasised that the connections between scientists all over the world are an incredibly important part of such vital research projects: "It is true that our expert colleagues helped us obtain reagents and knowledge about the virus, which is increasing every day. However, it is important that most of the expert knowledge and high-end research equipment be available at our institute if we want to achieve the best results. We have therefore established cooperation with other groups in Slovenia – veterinarians, pharmacists, doctors – which will be crucial to translate our knowledge into actual applications, and we could use this cooperation for future biomedical breakthroughs, contributing to the protection of health. Before the pandemic, we were concentrating on cancer immunotherapy research."



Scientists at the National Institute of Chemistry in Ljubljana.
Photo: National Institute of Chemistry in Ljubljana archives

INTENSIVE TESTING

Currently, two types of DNA vaccines are being tested on mice, while virus-like particles used for the vaccine are being tested in the laboratory by synthesising viral components based on the cell's DNA and using a cryo-electron microscope.

The first, partial results are promising: "We invented an easy and safe system to determine the virus neutralisation needed to monitor the effectiveness of the vaccine and detect any potential vulnerabilities of the virus. One of the medicines, originally used for other purposes, showed promising results. The approaches we set for the vaccines are encouraging, but the vaccine's effects in animals are key, and we expect to learn more about these by the end of the summer if everything goes according to plan," said Dr Roman Jerala.

THEY WANT TO SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE

At the National Institute of Chemistry, they stressed they want to contribute their knowledge and energy to combating the pandemic.

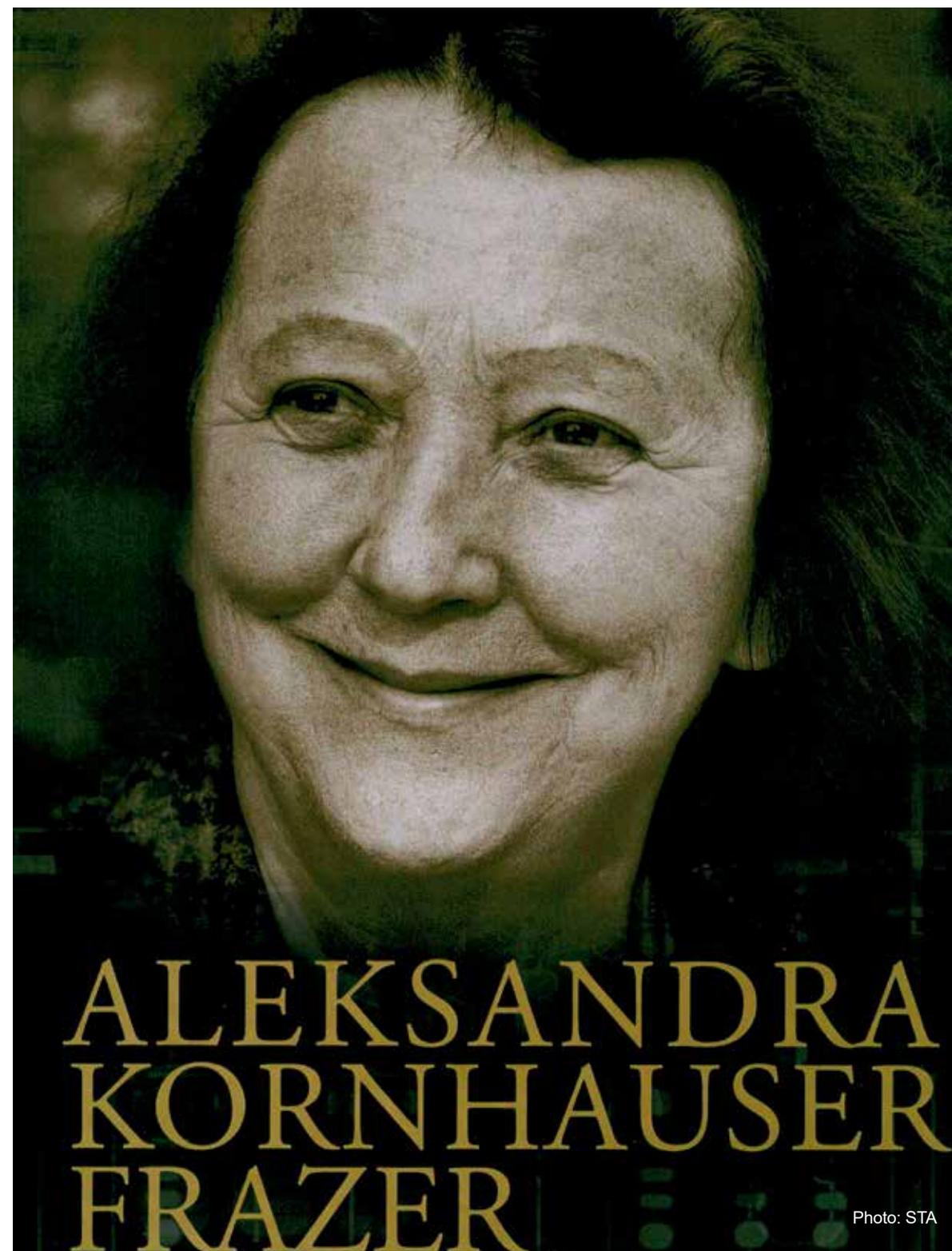
They tested several innovative concepts for the preparation of the vaccine and the neutralisation of the virus.

"It would be an excellent achievement if the test results were good, as it would serve as the basis for a clinical study. It is, however, true that this poses a great challenge—organisationally as well as financially. Considering others have significantly more resources and experience and are ahead of us, our opportunity is in employing a different approach. It is also important that the world prepares for future pandemics. We have to realise that a pandemic with another virus could have had even worse consequences, and therefore we have to bring together our ideas and technology to improve our arsenal of medicines and new approaches to ensure faster action in the case of other viruses that will inevitably emerge in the future."

Aleksandra Kornhauser Frazer

Slovenians have always contributed significantly to the development of scientific discoveries. The 93-year-old chemist and professor Aleksandra Kornhauser Frazer, a member of the World Academy of Art & Science, and the World Academy of Sciences, which works to advance science in developing countries, passed away earlier this year. She was the dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana, professor at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Technology, dean of the Jožef Stefan International Postgraduate School, and lecturer at many universities abroad. Her field of research was the chemistry of natural compounds, while in the 1980s she predominantly taught information science methodology with applications in research, education and development in industry.

She headed many national and international projects for education in chemistry, the protection of the environment, and sustainable development, especially within the EU, for the US EPA, and as part of international projects organised by UNESCO-UNIDO, UNDB and the World Bank, as well as bilateral projects, especially in the US and Italy. In 1991, she was received the title the Ambassador of Science of the Republic of Slovenia, in 1997 the National Award of the Republic of Slovenia for Lifetime Achievements, and in 2000 the Silver Order of Freedom of the Republic of Slovenia.



IN FOCUS



Alen Bučar, Žan Brezec and Bor Brezec developed CashCleaner, a device that disinfects banknotes.
Photo: CashCleaner archives

IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD TIME FOR NEW CHALLENGES INNOVATIONS AND SOLIDARITY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

DANILO GOLOB

WHEN SLOVENIA FACED THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC IN MARCH, OUR LIVES WERE UPENDED. DID THE CRISIS OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW IDEAS AND CHALLENGES? YES, IN SLOVENIA WE WITNESSED THE STORIES OF PEOPLE WHO MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION DUE TO THEIR POSITIVE OUTLOOK, THE SOLUTIONS THEY PROVIDED AND THEIR DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS.

Three young Slovenians – the brothers Bor and Žan Brezec and their friend Alen Bučar – undertook an interesting project. During the epidemic, hygiene standards were increased in order to protect people's health.

It became mandatory to disinfect hands, indoor areas, and so on. But what about cash?

By conducting a survey in which 230 people took part, the trio discovered that more than half of the respondents had concerns about the disease being spread through banknotes, and more than 80 per cent of the participants answered they would use another cash machine if it offered disinfected money. The Brezec brothers and Alen combined their knowledge of electrical engineering, industrial design and mechanical engineering, which resulted in the invention of a device that can kill the viruses and bacteria on banknotes.

CASHCLEANER

The device is called CashCleaner, and is capable of disinfecting up to a hundred banknotes per minute using UV-C light, a technology employed for the disinfection of hospitals, laboratories, operating rooms and other similar environments. In making the device, the trio were constantly driven by the desire to do their utmost to help solve some of the problems connected to the coronavirus epidemic. When developing the machine, they faced quite a few challenges.

The structure and design of functional parts and housings had to be constantly modified and adapted according to the production processes and locally available materials.

Another obstacle they had to overcome was teleworking, where strong teamwork and joint problem-solving were of vital importance. They managed to develop the device in just over a month, using their own funds.

The young inventors are now looking for an investor to help them finalise its development and certify the device. This would enable them to cast their net wider in terms of production and to start selling the device. Interest has also been shown in other countries, which is why their next goal is to breakthrough into international markets.

CHEFS AND CATERERS JOINED FORCES

During the epidemic, restaurants, eateries, cafés and bars across Slovenia were forced to close their doors. Even though the chefs and other staff experienced extreme hardships due to the closures, many of them decided they would come together and help those experiencing even more greater problems. They thus started preparing meals to give those who worked hard to ensure the safety and health of all Slovenians during the crisis.

CHEFS CARE

At the end of March, the Chefs Care charity project was launched in Slovenia at the initiative of chef Iztok Gumzej from Zasavje; the project involved making light meals and lunches for the key workers and the most vulnerable groups during the epidemic, and it was joined by more than 130 chefs and caterers from across the country. Altogether, they prepared over 4,000 free meals for healthcare workers, police officers, firefighters, members of the Civil Protection Service, teachers and the elderly.

The only condition for participating in the Chefs Care initiative was that all meals had to be prepared free of charge and from ingredients the chefs had at home.

Chef Gumzej first cooked for the employees of the Hrastnik Community Health Centre, and later on for the Ljubljana Institute of Oncology, the Civil Protection Service and the Hrastnik Red Cross. Among the first

to respond to his invitation to participate in the project were the following three chefs: Branko Podmenik, who also made meals for the Hrastnik Community Health Centre, Miran Ojsteršek (Oštirka Restaurant) and Marko Pavčnik (Pavus), both of whom cooked meals for the employees of the Laško Community Health Centre, police officers, members of the Red Cross and the medical staff at the Celje Hospital. Igor Jagodic (Strelec, Ljubljana) cooked for the Kranj Community Health Centre's emergency medical service team, while Janez Bratovž (JB Restaurant, Ljubljana) and Uroš Štefelin (Vila Podvin, Mošnje) made lunches for the Kamnik Police Station and the Radovljica Police Station, respectively. Bine Volčič (Monstera, Ljubljana) put together meals for the Kranj Fire Brigade, at Dvor Jezeršek they cooked for employees of the Snaga public utilities company, Tanja Pintarič (Rajh, Bakovci) arranged meals for employees of the Murska Sobota Pharmacy and Ana Roš (Hiša Franko, Kobarid) prepared meals for employees of the Tolmin Upper Secondary School.

The initiative spread throughout Slovenia and eventually even crossed the border. The culinary charity baton

was passed on to chefs in Croatia, London, Prague and Budapest.

HELP PROVIDED BY THE AMBASSADORS OF THE SLOVENIAN ECONOMY

The ambassadors of the Slovenian economy, which were selected as part of the campaign I FEEL SLOVENIA. GREEN. CREATIVE. SMART., also devoted their skills and offered their products to those who took care of our health and anyone who found themselves in distress during the epidemic.

The Lotrič Metrology company and the partners in the Diham consortium are to be given credit for providing Slovenians



Pipistrel helped the local community by providing 100,000 protective masks and 1,100 test kits.
Photo: Nea Culpa; Mankica Kranjec/www.slovenia.info



During the epidemic, chefs did not cook for guests, but instead prepared free meals for workers on the frontlines of the coronavirus crisis.
Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik/www.slovenia.info

with the prototype of a ventilator which they developed in just one month.

The EQUA company donated 1,000 EQUA water bottles to employees of the university medical centres in Ljubljana and Maribor in order to express their gratitude for their efforts, which contributed to the health and well-being of all those who, at the time of the crisis, were most at risk of infection due to the nature of their work. As part of the charity campaign My drawing. My milk. My help., the Ljubljanske Mlekarne dairy gifted their products to Slovenian organisations that take care of people on a daily basis. The Pipistrel aircraft company also helped the local community to implement protective measures by providing 100,000 protective masks and 1,100 test kits.

The positive actions of various individuals and groups show that in Slovenia the feeling of solidarity and desire to assist others were strengthened even more during the epidemic, and prove that Slovenians know how to stand together even in times of crisis in order to ensure our health and for the common good.



The EQUA company donated 1,000 EQUA water bottles.
Photo: EQUA archives



IN FOCUS

The first place in the I feel Slovenia product category was awarded to the Slostick company.

THE INNOVATIVE SPIRIT OF SLOVENIAN YOUTH MY COMPANY PROJECT

TEA KNAFLIČ, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

ON 8 MAY 2020, THE 7TH STUDENT COMPANY FAIR TOOK PLACE. THIS YEAR, IT WAS HELD ONLINE. AT THE CONCLUDING EVENT THE PANEL PRESENTED PRIZES AND AWARDS TO THE BEST STUDENT COMPANIES.

This school year, 62 student companies from 19 Slovenian secondary schools were founded. Students were competing to win in various categories, including the best I feel Slovenia product category, which was introduced for the first time this year. But by far the most coveted title was undoubtedly Student Company of the Year, as the winners qualify for the JA Europe Company of the Year Competition, where students compete against their peers from other European countries.

The diverse selection of products made by students within the My Company programme shows that Slovenian youth is inventive and eager for entrepreneurial experience.

For several years, the Institute for the Promotion of Youth Entrepreneurship has been offering practical training on entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship in secondary schools under the global JA Company Programme of the Junior Achievement non-profit organisation. The programme enables young people to discover their entrepreneurial potential. During the school year, Slovenian students go through the entire process of creating a company. They begin by deciding on a business idea, followed by considering its possible realisation, making an overview of the competition, creating a business plan, selling shares and finally surviving in the market, which might just be the most difficult part.

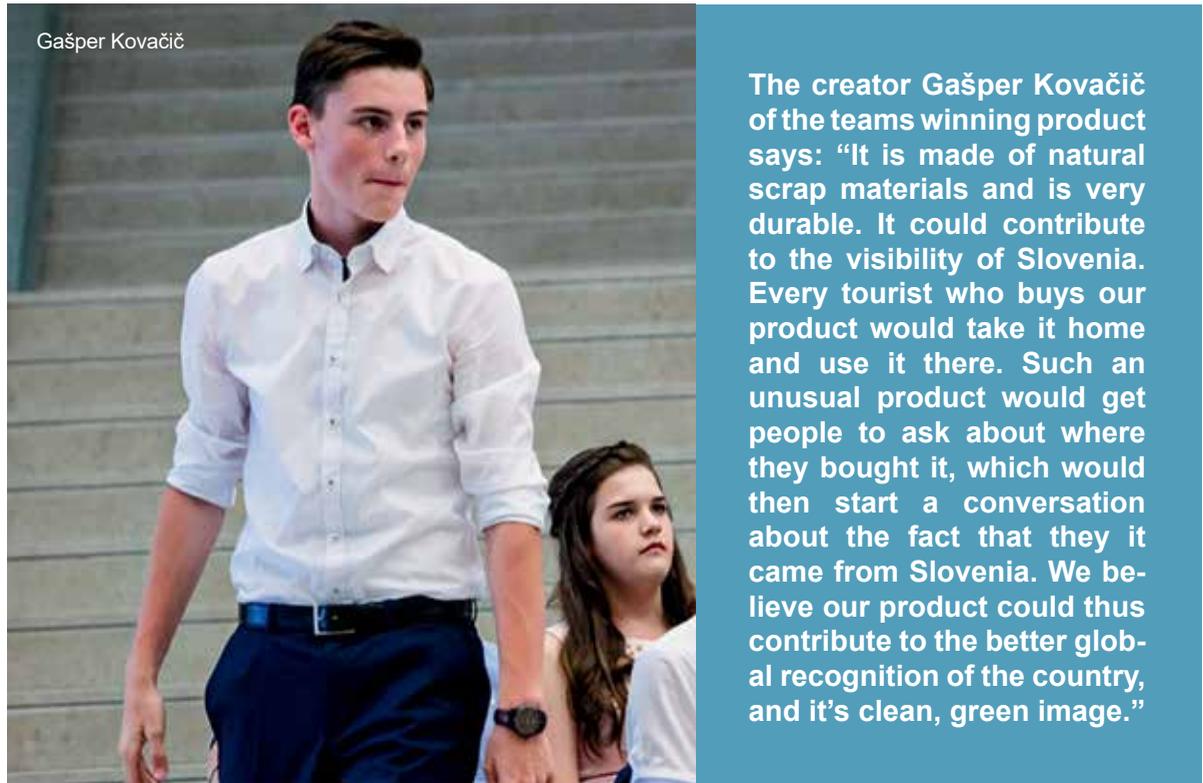
As the guardian of the I feel Slovenia national brand, the Government Communication Office decided to participate in the My Company project.

The interest among young people was considerable, since 19 student companies decided to focus on the I feel Slovenia product category. The director of the Institute for the Promotion of Youth Entrepreneurship, Jožica Rejec, believes that this project is important because of the visibility and recognition of the I feel Slovenia national brand.

AWARDS

First place in the I feel Slovenia product category was awarded to the Slostick company. Two students from the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium and a student from Gymnasium Vič designed a wooden cord winder for headphones to prevent them from getting tangled up. The director of Slostick, Gašper Kovačič, says of his idea: "In October, I was on my way home from school after a training session. The weather wasn't very good, the classes that day had been difficult and tiring and I was also exhausted after training. I took my headphones from the pocket to relax a little, but they were all tangled up. I thought the last thing I needed at that moment was to have to untangle my headphones. When I got home, I started browsing the internet for a product that would solve my problem. I didn't find one, and since I was still under the influence of the innovation camp that was held at our school, I decided to make the product myself." With regard to the challenges the young entrepreneurs faced, he adds: "The biggest challenge was selling shares. It was difficult to convince our classmates and friends to invest some money in our product. It was difficult to convince them that this was a good idea in which it was worth investing. Nobody wanted to be the first person to invest."

Second place was awarded to the company Neki domač'ga, founded by students from the Biotechnical Educational Centre Ljubljana. The girls interviewed potential customers about the flavours they would prefer and decided to make crackers with four different tastes: the Carniolan sausage flavoured Kran'čan, the Tolmin cheese flavoured Tolmin'c, the pumpkin seed and shallot flavoured Prekmur'c and the rosemary and Piran salt flavoured Piran'čan. They thus selected some excellent Slovenian flavours, that would appeal to the local market. As the director of Neki domač'ga, Lara Tošič, says of their idea: "At the beginning of the year, we actually had no idea what our company would be making. As soon as our business professor Mirjam Gorenc told us we could participate in the I feel Slovenia category, we knew we wanted to make something with the flavours of traditional Slovenian dishes. After a few days of deliberation, we decided to make crackers."



Gašper Kovačič

The creator Gašper Kovačič of the teams winning product says: "It is made of natural scrap materials and is very durable. It could contribute to the visibility of Slovenia. Every tourist who buys our product would take it home and use it there. Such an unusual product would get people to ask about where they bought it, which would then start a conversation about the fact that they it came from Slovenia. We believe our product could thus contribute to the better global recognition of the country, and it's clean, green image."

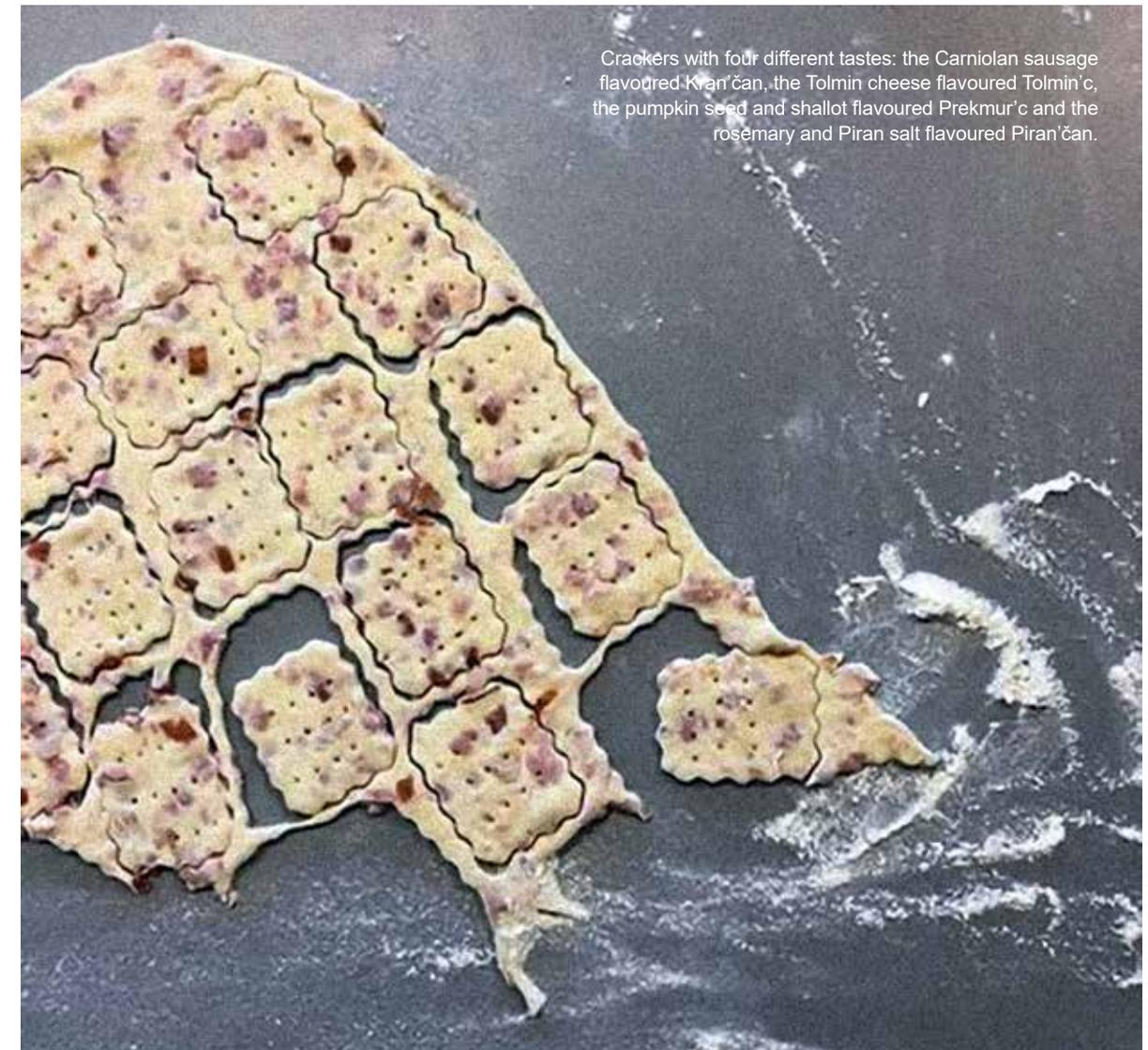


The second place was awarded to the company Neki domač'ga, founded by students from the Biotechnical Educational Centre Ljubljana.

Third place in the I feel Slovenia category was awarded to the Woodpecker company from Gymnasium Šentvid. Their goal was to substitute plastic whiteboard wipers for more environmentally friendly wooden ones. The director of the company, Nataša Krapež, says of the importance of making connections during the project: "We wanted our company to focus not only on the environmental issue, but also on the social aspect. By connecting with other Slovenian companies, we received high-quality materials and services that we could test personally while also supporting local businesses." According to Nataša Krapež, one of the most important qualities needed to become a successful businessperson is being organised, since, despite

having a good idea, a company can be unsuccessful due to bad organisation. It is also essential that a good businessperson is creative and has initiative, because having both a good idea and a drive for success can get you very far.

The director of the Institute for the Promotion of Youth Entrepreneurship, Jožica Rejec, concluded the event by telling the students: "Everyone who completed the project is a winner. The competences you acquired, particularly your courage to try things and work in a team, will come in useful both in your everyday life and in your business ventures, whether working as a part of a company or on your own."



Crackers with four different tastes: the Carniolan sausage flavoured Kran'čan, the Tolmin cheese flavoured Tolmin'c, the pumpkin seed and shallot flavoured Prekmur'c and the rosemary and Piran salt flavoured Piran'čan.



POPRI COMPETITION

STUDENTS IMPRESS WITH CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL SOLUTIONS

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE TO TEST THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL IDEAS. ONCE AGAIN THIS YEAR, PRIMARY SCHOOL, SECONDARY SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS COMPETED AT THE POPRI COMPETITION. FOR THE FIRST TIME THE PRIMORSKA TECHNOLOGY PARK CARRIED OUT THE COMPETITION VIA ONLINE PLATFORMS, AND THEN ANNOUNCED THE WINNERS ON MAY 15. ANOTHER FIRST WAS THAT SLOVENIANS WHO LIVE IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES ALSO PARTICIPATED IN THE CONTEST.

This year, 328 competitors, who developed 114 business models, entered the competition.

The POPRI competition is organised by Primorska Technology Park in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Development, Investment and Tourism (SPIRIT Slovenia) and the Slovenian Enterprise Fund.

The competitors were grouped into three categories: primary school students, secondary school students and young adults up to the age of 29.

This year, 114 teams and 74 mentors from 72 educational institutions from Slovenia and abroad participated in the competition.

The prize fund amounted to EUR 30,000, and was provided by the Slovenian Enterprise Fund.

TURNADO, MULTIDILCA AND URVI

In the category of primary school students, Ian Pirc from the Slovenska Bistrica Primary School most impressed the commission with an innovation named Turnado, which allows musicians who use tablets to read music and play without interruption.

Students from the Draga Bajca Primary School in Vipava ranked second for their innovation Multidilca, while third place was awarded to students from Dobravlje Primary School for their innovation Urvi Stick, which is able to transform energy and includes a button for making an emergency call.

HALYOU AIR, BUS TRACKER, AND COFFEE PLANTERSI

Secondary school students impressed the commission with Halyou Air. This innovation is a laboratory robe that

facilitates the work of researchers in laboratories and staff in healthcare institutions since it resolves the problem of sweating. The robe is an innovation developed by two secondary school students from the Grm School of Agriculture and the Biotechnical High School Novo mesto.

Second place was awarded to Bus Tracker, developed by secondary school students from Trieste. The Bus Tracker application enables the location of all city buses driving through Trieste (in Italy) to be monitored. Third prize was won by a team of secondary school students from the Novo mesto High School for their innovation Coffee Planters. These are biodegradable pots for seedling, and the main component of the pots is waste coffee sediment.

SIMATHLON, SMART LABELS AND BUSYPARK

In the category of young adults under the age of 29, the commission was most impressed by the Simathlon cycling simulation. This is a customised cycling game in which the users, through their activity and movement, control what happens in the game and cycle through different virtual landscapes. Its creator is Janez Dobnikar from the Technology Park Ljubljana.

Nikolina Kožar won second prize for Smart Labels, which are labels made of grape waste that include an added temperature indicator. The team from the Novo mesto Secondary School of Construction, Wood Technology and Preschool Education convinced the commission with its Busypark toy, a sensorimotor board that includes several different elements, such as a lock, a switch and a bell.





IN FOCUS

InstaText is the Slovenian Start:up of the Year 2020.

SLOVENIAN START:UP OF THE YEAR 2020

INSTATEXT

DANILA GOLOB, PHOTO: INSTATEXT ARCHIVES

BY USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGIES, INSTATEXT'S ONLINE PLATFORM AUTOMATICALLY IMPROVES TEXTS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. IT CREATES RECOMMENDATIONS AND IDEAS ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE CONTENT AND MAKE IT MORE READABLE AND UNDERSTANDABLE. IT CORRECTS GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND ENRICHES YOUR WRITING, ALL IN JUST A FEW SECONDS.

The company is involved in the development of automated text enhancement services in various languages. The international team consists of top experts in artificial intelligence, language technologies, natural language processing and software development.

The initial idea came from Dr Matej Guid, a Slovenian expert in the field of artificial intelligence, while Dr Marcus Hassler, an expert in the field of language technologies from Austria, also plays an important role in the development of the text improvement technology.

The majority of the team is from Slovenia.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION AS THE BASIS OF SUCCESS

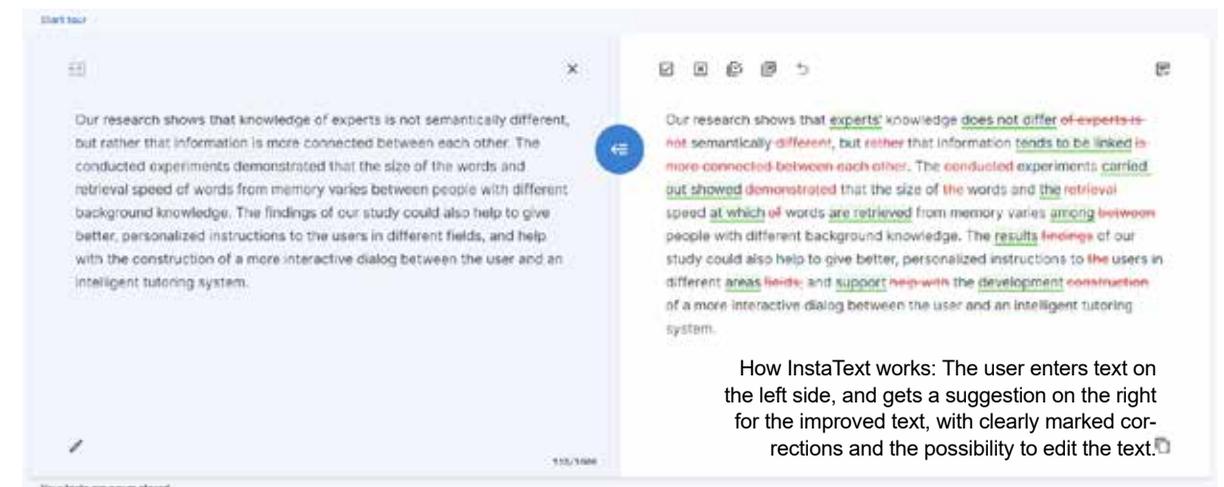
Dr Matej Guid, director and co-founder of InstaText, be-

lieves that clear and effective written communication is the key to success, both of an individual and of a society, adding, "With the support of artificial intelligence, we can raise the level of communication to a much higher level. We can thus write texts in English as if we were born and raised in England. InstaText helps us to achieve this."

In addition to correcting grammatical errors, InstaText also enriches the text by offering suggestions to improve the vocabulary and make more appropriate use of words.

If necessary, it transforms the whole sentence and puts it into the context of the text. It creates significantly more ideas and offers deeper ways to improve the text than any tools currently available. "In a way it represents a competent interlocutor with whom we improve our texts in real time, but of course, as the authors of the text we can choose to agree or disagree with its suggestions," explains Dr Matej Guid.

The innovative online platform is intended for all who use written language in their professional communication, including those working at international compa-



How InstaText works: The user enters text on the left side, and gets a suggestion on the right for the improved text, with clearly marked corrections and the possibility to edit the text.

nies, translation agencies, public relations agencies, law offices, government institutions, and press agencies, as well as professional authors and individuals involved in academic writing.

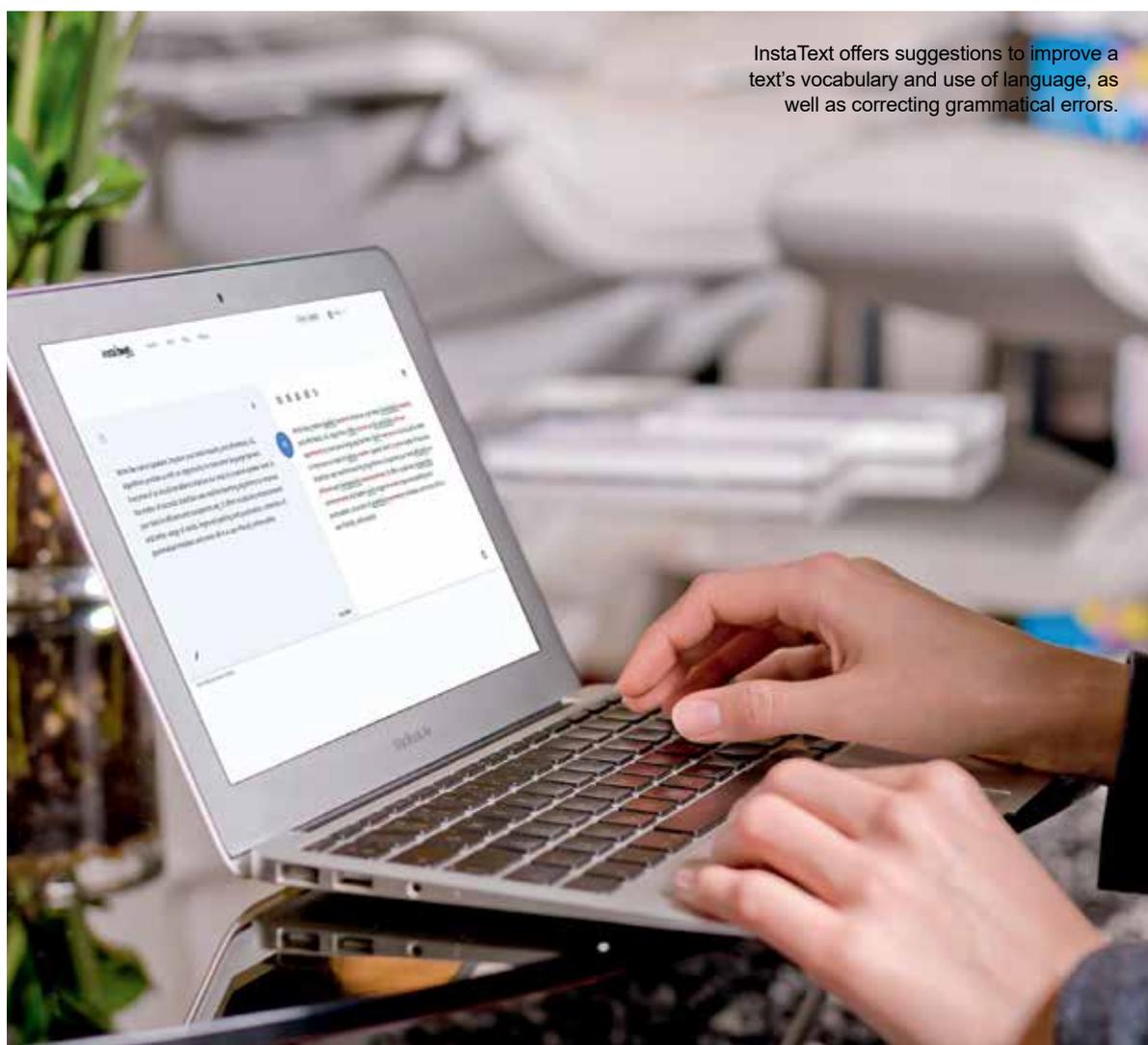
A SUCCESSFUL START AND AMBITIOUS PLANS

In just the first three months of launching the InstaText online platform, it gained more than 5,000 active users from over 50 countries.

The view that InstaText is something new, special and has rapid growth potential, was also made by the Slovenian Start:up committee in 2020: "It is a company that has long-term ambitions, the potential to grow globally, a great competitive advantage in its niche, stands firm-

ly on its feet and as the last – but very important fact for Slovenia – it is a part of the wider community, from which it draws first and then, on the path of success, returns to it."

"The Slovenian Start:up Award represents an exceptional encouragement and confirmation that the seeds our ideas have fallen on fertile ground," says Dr Matej Guid proudly. He is already planning new ventures: "Our intention is to support all the world's most important languages. This year we also plan to offer the improvement of texts in German, although we are currently focusing on English, and on further improvements to the web application. These will enable users to better adapt the tool to their needs and style of writing."



InstaText offers suggestions to improve a text's vocabulary and use of language, as well as correcting grammatical errors.

SLOVENIAN START:UP OF THE YEAR 2020 FINALISTS

In addition to the winning team at InstaText, the following start-ups also qualified for the finals:

- **Evegreen**, which develops 100% bio-degradable and eco-friendly materials made from organic waste;
- **Influee**, which develops a platform where companies can find content creators and influencers for their audience all in one place;
- **Gridinstruments** with the Gridscope system, which provides electro-distribution companies with information about the network and enables the better planning of the expansion and reinforcement of their infrastructure.
- **Mouzen**, with an ergonomic device that optimises the position of the hand while working on a computer, thus reducing the tension in the wrist and shoulders.

SLOVENIA – THE LAND OF START-UPS

- The Slovene Enterprise Fund has financially supported around 650 start-ups in the last ten years;
- Start-up companies employ around 1,800 people in Slovenia;
- Their current revenues are around ten times higher compared to the initial year of operation, amounting to approximately EUR 700,000 per company per year;
- The top start-up supported by the fund, Celtra d.o.o., now generates revenue of more than EUR 30 million per year.

Source: Slovene Enterprise Fund (2019)



Dr Matej Guid, an expert in the field of artificial intelligence from Slovenia, and Dr Marcus Hassler, an expert in the field of language technologies from Austria.



GREEN CORNER

INDUSTRIAL HEMP IN SLOVENIA GREEN GOLD IN A GREEN COUNTRY

IRENA KOGOJ, PHOTO: PHARMAHEMP ARCHIVES

TOURISTS VISITING SLOVENIA LEAVE THE COUNTRY WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY HAVE JUST VISITED ONE OF THE GREENEST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD. BESIDES THE EXCELLENT AIR QUALITY AND DIVERSE WILDLIFE, PURE WATER AND CLEAN TOWNS, THERE IS A SPECIAL PLANT THAT GROWS HERE THAT IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS GREEN GOLD, AND WHICH IS SLOWLY BUT STEADILY REAPPEARING IN SLOVENIA IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. THIS VERSATILE PLANT IS INDUSTRIAL HEMP (CANNABIS SATIVA L.).

The beginnings of hemp cultivation in Slovenia date back to the 18th century, when it was mainly used to produce fibres. Later on, in the period leading up to World War II, it was cultivated in the area of present-day Slovenia on about 160 hectares; however, by the end of 1970s, cultivation had been completely abandoned. Due to its exceptionally wide range of uses in various industries, such as food, cosmetics, textiles and construction, hemp found its way back to Slovenian fields in 2005, when it was cultivated on approximately 27 hectares. In recent years, production has been steadily increasing (from 34 hectares in 2010 to 384 hectares in 2019), mainly due to the suitable Central European climate found here and the up-and-coming local companies that are incorporating this remarkable plant into their products. ”

Many different hemp-based cosmetics and personal care products, as well as oils, hemp seeds, tea and even mattresses with hemp fibres, are made in Slovenia.

Even national research centres and public health institutes are studying the benefits of hemp and the safety of hemp foodstuffs and food supplements.

PHARMAHEMP

One of the most successful business stories is Pharmahemp, a Slovenian-based company with a long and interesting history in the world of hemp. Roughly 20 years ago, Pharmahemp's predecessor launched the first line of personal care products containing hemp essential oil under the name Extravaganja. Later, in 2015, Pharmahemp introduced innovative products to the market that contained natural ingredients derived from hemp extracts – cannabidiol (CBD) and other beneficial cannabinoids.

The launch of these products represented an important milestone for Pharmahemp, as it positioned the company as a global pioneer among CBD products, which are now very popular.

Pharmahemp's best-selling product - 5% CBD drops in hemp oil.



The combination of highly-educated personnel and research collaborations results in an amazing and constantly growing range of hemp-derived oils, personal care products and cosmetics that contain CBD and other beneficial cannabinoids. Even though Pharmahemp is mainly an export-oriented company, with about 50 employees, it plays an important role in the Slovenian economy.

The future of hemp and hemp products in Slovenia is clearly bright, as these play an important role in the domestic economy and represent a great opportunity for sustainable development thanks to the substantial growth of the global industrial hemp market, one that the country's long experience with green gold will enable it to benefit from.

The company's passion for growth led to the development of several key activities that helped establish Pharmahemp as one of the largest hemp-related businesses on a global scale. The first of these was the setting up of an analytical laboratory, Pharmahemp Laboratories, to carry out tests to determine cannabinoid content in products. In addition to the quality control of their own production, Pharmahemp Laboratories also performs analyses for other clients – from foreign and Slovenian hemp cultivators to the producers of products such as food, food supplements and cosmetics. Pharmahemp's second key activity is carried out by its research and development department, which actively collaborates with renowned national and international research institutes such as the Jožef Stefan Institute, the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Ljubljana, the Institute of Chemical Technology at the University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague, and the Department of Paediatric Neurology at the University Medical Centre Ljubljana.



CBD balm.



The Slovenian company Hannah biz offers various foods from industrial hemp.



GREEN CORNER

Andrej Peršin

THE LETTUCE OF TRNOVO – A STORY OF OUR IDENTITY AND CREATIVITY

A MAGICAL GARDEN IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

ANDREJ PERŠIN IS THE ONLY LETTUCE PRODUCER FROM TRNOVO WHO DELIVERS HIS PRODUCE TO THE LJUBLJANA CENTRAL MARKET WITH A CIZA (A WOODEN TWO-WHEELED TROLLEY). AT A PRESTIGIOUS LOCATION IN THE HEART OF LJUBLJANA, IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF BLOCKS OF FLATS IN TRNOVO, TOGETHER WITH HIS MOTHER AND BROTHER HE OWNS THE LAND ON WHICH HE GROWS VEGETABLES. HE IS ALSO ONE OF LJUBLJANA'S ATTRACTIONS, RECORDED ON FILM AND IN A TRAVEL GUIDE.

The Peršin farm has been producing and selling seedlings and seasonal vegetables since 1920. They are the so-called lettuce producers of Trnovo. They sell their produce at the open-air market from Monday to Saturday in season, from the beginning of April until the end of November.

stayed at home, helped retain ownership of the garden and prevented it from being paved over with concrete. Otherwise, residential buildings would be standing on their Trnovo plots today. As in the past, this magical garden boasting Trnovo iceberg lettuce remains their main source of income.

Following after his grandmother Frančiška, who started selling on the market in 1921, and his father Mihael, Andrej continues the family tradition of growing vegetables.

Every day, Andrej transports seasonal vegetables from his garden to the Ljubljana Central Market with his ciza.

He never imagined that he would be earning his living with such an activity. However, fate has its own ways. In 1995, Andrej decided to quit his well-paid job and take on something much riskier: growing seasonal vegetables in the centre of town. He was determined not to seek another job because he realised that his livelihood was right on his doorstep. His wife Mateja, who combined care for their son with work from home, also became involved in home production. "I insist on this way of transporting vegetables to the market due to tradition and visibility. This is my advantage. If I simply stood behind a stall I would be just another vegetable seller. But if I stand at a ciza, I'm already telling a story," says Andrej.

His farm is the only one still inside the heart of the city centre, while others have been taken over by interest in different land uses. In 1980, there were attempts to seize the Peršin family's garden, which was bought by Andrej's grandfather in 1882. However, the four small children together with their mother and father, who both



The only lettuce producer who delivers his produce with a ciza.



The farm in the heart of the city centre.

Solatendorf, which is German for Salad Village.

To this very day, Krakovo functions as an autonomous world inside world. Many people have since found it to be an ideal place to live because it is at the centre of everything, but at the same time remote, as if it were a village. In addition to the typical houses and gardens of Krakovo, a visitor following this themed trail can take a tour of Plečnik's house and stroll along Plečnik's land axis passing many of his works. The oldest residents of Krakovo love to rekindle their memories of the famed architect, who went to work from his home situated behind the Trnovo Church to the present Faculty of Architecture.

LJUBLJANA ICEBERG LETTUCE FROM KRAKOV, A CULINARY DELIGHT

Almost everyone agrees that it is difficult to find a crisper and more delicious lettuce than the Ljubljana iceberg lettuce from Krakovo. Unfortunately, only two descendants of the great Krakovo lettuce varieties remain at Ljubljana Central Market.

To help preserve the tradition, the city of Ljubljana includes a Ljubljana iceberg lettuce trail in its tourism offer.

The tour starts at the Gradaščica River to the south of Ljubljana, which separates the two former suburban areas of Trnovo and Krakovo. These have long been known as special districts with their own character and without any urban feeling. In the former suburban fishing village of Krakovo, close to the unregulated riverbanks of the Ljubljanica and Gradaščica, there once lived people who were settled there by German knights.

Due to the vicinity of the river, the men were engaged in fishing and sold fish at the fish market in today's Old Town of Ljubljana. Fishing nets were always spread between the houses. To gain extra income, the women of Krakovo grew vegetables on the long, narrow land plots behind their houses, including the crisp and fresh iceberg lettuce of Trnovo or Krakovo, which was subsequently renamed the Ljubljana iceberg lettuce.

Another characteristic of Krakovo vegetable producers were the ciza that they used to bring the lettuce from the gardens to the central city market.

The streets were narrow and full of various goods, which is why the wooden two-wheeled trolleys pushed by the women themselves were considered an ideal means of transport. The trolleys also functioned as market stalls. If the vegetable producers wanted to secure a good selling spot, they would have to leave home soon after midnight. Fortunately, this tradition is maintained by Andrej, who wakes up at five in the morning to fill his ciza with first-class vegetables and slowly leaves for the market an hour later. Minutes before eight, he is already awaiting his customers with top quality vegetables, picked fresh that today to enjoy.

So, does he sell only as much vegetables as he can transport? "Well, not entirely," he admits. "I bring half of it by car." In recent years, Andrej has been besieged by European film crews (German Arte, a Dutch broadcaster, etc.) who wanted to record this economic miracle and curiosity in the centre of a European capital.

KRAKOV, THE OLDEST SUBURBAN AREA OF LJUBLJANA

The former fishing village nestled in the triangle between the outflow of the Gradaščica River into the Ljubljanica boasts a long reputation of having by far the best vegetable producers. The bent posture of vegetable sellers from Krakovo and Trnovo, who supplied their produce to the Ljubljana Central Market on their two-wheeled cizas, is the best proof of the infinite patience with which they tended their garden beds, unique soil and its rewarding produce day and night.

Behind the houses of Krakovo, the narrow land plots still feature long gardens on which the women of the neighbourhood grew various vegetables, including the crisp and delicious iceberg lettuce, and transported it to the central city market, while contributing to the modest family budget with proceeds from sales.

This is why Krakovo is widely known as



Ljubljana iceberg lettuce from Krakovo - a culinary delight.

A TRUE ADVENTURE

BEAR-WATCHING IN THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

POLONA PREŠEREN, PHOTO: MARJAN ARTNAK

GREEN CORNER

THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE IN EUROPE FOR BEAR-WATCHING IN NATURE THAN SLOVENIA, WHERE THEIR POPULATION HAS INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY IN RECENT YEARS. THE BROWN BEAR IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS ANIMALS IN SLOVENIAN FORESTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE KOČEVJE AREA, BUT IS ALSO THEIR LARGEST WILD ANIMAL.

Due to their wild and unspoilt nature, the vast and primeval forests in the Kočevje area are home to numerous animal and plant species that are now found hardly anywhere else in Europe. The locals have thus learnt to live in harmony with the various relatively rare creatures that have taken advantage of the favourable conditions to make their homes there. These animals include wolves and lynx and brown bears – the latter being the most famous animal in the forests of the Kočevje area.

The brown bear, the largest carnivore in Europe, is a protected species in the country. In 1993 it was put on the Red List of Threatened Species in Slovenia.

Experts from the Biotechnical Faculty of the University of Ljubljana estimate that in 2018 the number of bears in Slovenia was between 875 and 1,130, the most likely figure being around 975. The natality rate of the Slovenian bear is about 24%, and the population has increased by approximately 150% in the last 20 years.

BEAR-WATCHING

The natural resources of the Kočevje area allow tourists to experience interesting tourism products such as bear-watching. Seize the opportunity to meet a bear up close by going on a guided adventure tour around the forest, where you can observe this amazing animal in its natural habitat. Twenty tourist guides, who have been trained specifically for this purpose, specialise in guided tours that enable visitors to meet bears from a safe distance.

As a representative of the Kočevsko Institute, which is in charge of tourism in the region, says: “Bear-watching programmes were developed in participation with the Biotechnical Faculty and according to the recommendations of the Life DinalpBear project and with the Slovenian Forest Service and the Institute Factory of Sustainable tourism GoodPlace. We offer one- or two-day programmes for small groups of a maximum of eight people. The group is accompanied by a specialised tourist guide at all times and also by a hunter from the observatory.”

On such excursions, visitors familiarise themselves with the bear's characteristics and habits, they follow the bear's signs, learn how to coexist with the animal and watch its activities in the evening from specially designed observatories in the company of a hunter. Experience this unforgettable adventure in the pristine primeval forests of the Kočevje area.

The participants of the programmes, which were all awarded the bear-friendly label, discover how to live in harmony with this large animal.

The people in the Kočevje area have successfully co-existed with bears for centuries. The bear is a shy animal by nature and prefers to avoid humans. The programmes allow you to see the unknown side of the largest European carnivore, hear interesting stories, experience the bear's natural environment and follow its footprints in the forest. The Kočevsko area has thus become a prime example of responsible co-existence with wild animals.



INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BEARS

LIFESPAN: from 25 years in nature to 40 years in captivity.

WEIGHT: adult female brown bears weigh from 85kg to 160kg, males from 130kg to 260kg (on rare occasions even up to 360kg).

SIZE: adult female brown bears are on average 150cm long and 70cm tall, males on average 180cm long and 85cm tall.

DIET: bears are omnivores, but above all they are opportunistic eaters. Their diet is ever-changing and dependent on the season. It includes everything from grass, wild garlic, ants, wild wasps and dead deer to forest berries and fruits.

NUMBER OF CUBS: 1–4 (usually 2)



ENCOUNTERING A BEAR

Despite the large population of bears in Slovenian forests, it is rare to encounter one. Bears are cautious animals which see humans as a threat and prefer to avoid them. If you do encounter a bear, it is most important to stay calm, not to shout and not to gesticulate wildly to avoid scaring the bear even further. Try to address the animal with a calm voice to let it acknowledge your presence and move away. Move slowly without sudden movements or shouting, do not throw stones at the animal, do not run away, do not climb a tree and, above all, never approach bear cubs.



GREEN CORNER

FOREST FRUITS

A TREASURE CHEST OF HEALTHY FOOD

TEA KNAFLIČ, PHOTO: KCLINE-GETTYIMAGES/GULLIVERFILM&FOTO

WHEN IT GETS WARM, NATURE INVITES YOU TO TAKE A WALK IN THE MEADOWS AND FORESTS. FOREST HIKE ARE AN EXCELLENT CHOICE FOR THOSE WISHING TO UNWIND IN PEACE AND QUIET, AND YOU CAN ALSO TO FORAGE FOR FRUITS, SOMETHING THAT MANY SLOVENIANS ENJOY.

You can pick blueberries and other delights in both public and private forests, as forest fruits are considered a public good under Slovenian legislation. However, you should harvest forest fruits with great care.

Do not damage the plants and pick only as much as you can eat, with the law stipulating how many kilograms you are allowed to take home.

June is blueberry season, and picking them can be a joyous occasion for all the family, young and old, who after a few hours emerge from the forest with baskets full of delicious berries and purple-stained fingers and lips.

FOREST TASTES

When blueberries ripen depends not only on the temperature, but also on the altitude at which they grow. The season first starts in lower lying areas. The plant is a low-growing, green shrub with many branches laden with sweet berries. But be warned, you are allowed to pick a maximum of two kilograms of blueberries per person. While blueberries taste best when eaten fresh you can, of course, also put them in the freezer, dry them or make fruit brandy. They are a delicious ingredient in many cakes, while homemade blueberry ice cream and pastries will make your mouth water. Blueberry jam, juice or tea can also be found in many Slovenian homes, and soaking blueberries in homemade brandy and adding sugar is another favourite recipe. Tasty blueberry liqueur is traditionally served as an appetiser at tourist farms and local inns. Blueberries are not only very popular in Slovenia, but also have proven health benefits.

Raspberries can be harvested all over Slovenia from mid-July onwards. They grow not only in gardens but are also commonly found along forest trails and in clearings. Raspberries prefer sparse forests where there is a lot of light. Raspberry plants are tall shrubs armed with prickles. This sweet fruit should be eaten straight away, as raspberries are easily damaged by handling and hence difficult to transport. Raspberries are considered a healthy food.

Similar to raspberries, blackberries grow on prickly shrubs. As the name tells you, these sweet berries are black, and in Slovenia they ripen in late summer. All parts of the plant, and especially leaves, have healing powers.

Wild strawberries are yet another popular forest fruit. Although much smaller than ordinary strawberries, they are also much sweeter. They usually grow on small shrubs lining meadows, mountain trails and forest edges, and can be found as high up as 2,000 metres above sea level. Wild berries are rich in vitamin C and iron. Slovenian housewives most often make delicious jam from them.

Mushroom hunting is a favourite pastime of Slovenians, and there are more than 20 mushroom clubs covering the entire Slovenian territory. The mushroom picking season starts in early spring and peaks in autumn. Mushrooms thrive when there is sufficient rain and, according to some enthusiasts, during the full moon. Regardless of how rich the mushroom season is, you are allowed to pick a maximum of two kilograms per person. Soups and various sauces are the most common mushroom dishes in Slovenia. Mushrooms that are not used immediately can also be frozen or blanched and stored in jars.

RESPECT THE FORESTS

Slovenian forests are in good condition, and because we would like to keep them that way forest etiquette is very important. Do not forget that forests are home to many animals and plants. Do not break branches or in any other way damage plants. Dogs must be kept on a leash, so that they do not frighten the animals, and for the same reason you should be as quiet as possible. Do not litter, but instead take your waste with you and dispose of it in a garbage container.

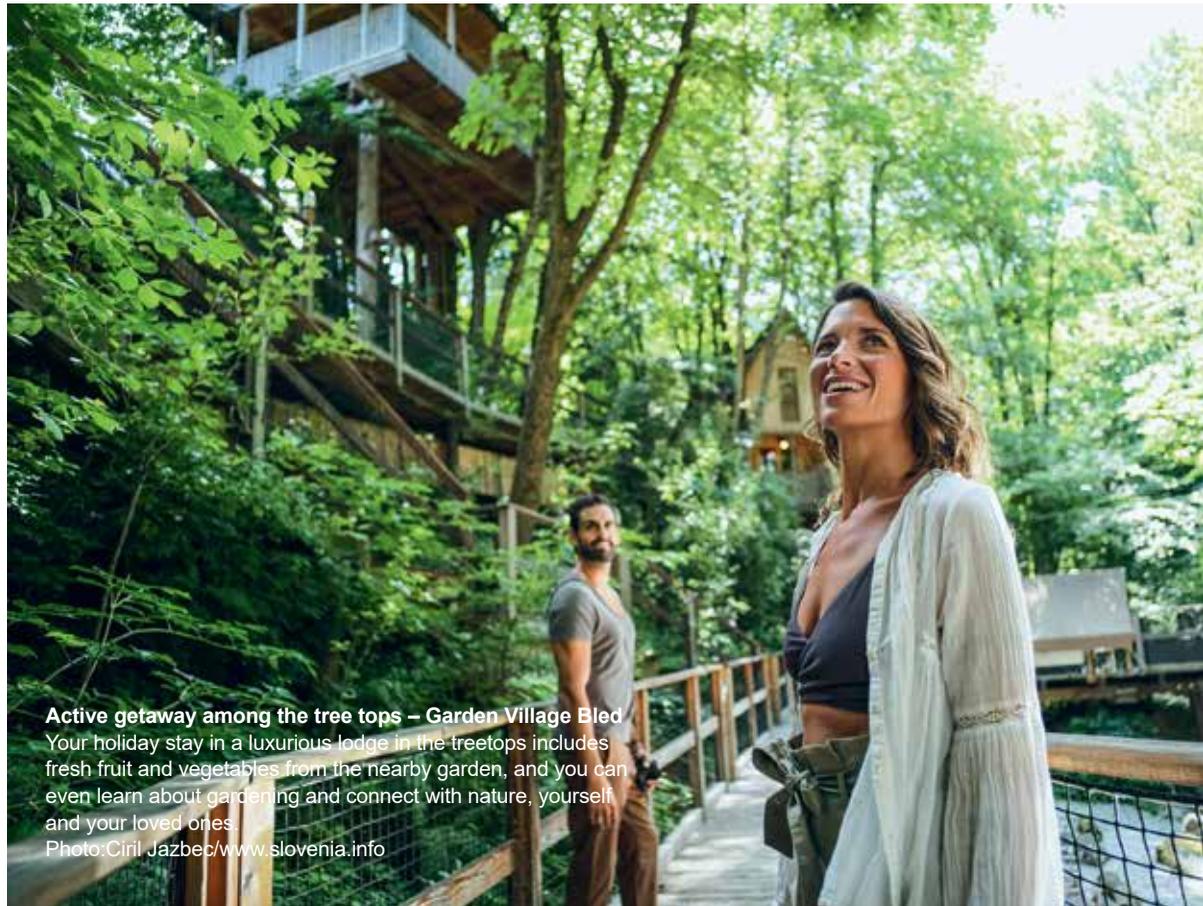
In Slovenia, we are well aware of the positive effects of forests on people and the environment. Slovenians thus take pride in the fact that almost 60% of the country is covered by forests. Forests are a symbol and treasure of Slovenia.

When picking forest fruits, do not stray from the trails.



GASTRONOMY

An unforgettable day at the Fonda fish farm
Explore the northernmost fish farm in the Adriatic Sea, situated within the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park and in the company of biologists who want to produce the world's best-tasting saltwater fish. Listen to their delicious and passionate story while sailing towards the sea farm and finish off by tasting the Piran sea bass with fleur de sel and Istrian olive oil.
Photo: Arne Hodalič/www.slovenia.info



Active getaway among the tree tops – Garden Village Bled
Your holiday stay in a luxurious lodge in the treetops includes fresh fruit and vegetables from the nearby garden, and you can even learn about gardening and connect with nature, yourself and your loved ones.
Photo: Ciril Jazbec/www.slovenia.info

TASTE SLOVENIA

GREEN DESTINATION FOR UNIQUE AND SUSTAINABLE CULINARY EXPERIENCES

MORANA POLOVIČ

SLOVENIA IS ONE OF THE GREENEST AND MOST SUSTAINABILITY-ORIENTED COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD. THE COUNTRY'S GREEN NATURE IS REFLECTED IN ORIGINAL EXPERIENCES ALLOWING VISITORS TO DISCOVER GASTRONOMIC SPECIALTIES AND LOCAL FLAVOURS THAT WERE FORMED BY THE RICH CULINARY HERITAGE INTERLACED WITH TRADITION AND CUSTOMS AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE ALPS, MEDITERRANEAN, KARST AND THE PANNONIAN PLAIN.

Its diverse range of culinary events makes Slovenia an attractive tourist destination in any season. Seasonal ingredients are a quintessential part of the local cuisine. Slovenia, which holds the title of the European Region of Gastronomy 2021, promotes the development of green supply chains that enable an authentic experience of Slovenian gastronomy.

The www.tasteslovenia.si portal tells the full story of cuisine that is based on the philosophy from garden to plate, local suppliers, the best ingredients, heritage and tradition enhanced by modern approaches of internationally recognised chefs who create eye-catching and tasty dishes.

In its promotion, the Slovenian Tourist Board emphasises the best that Slovenia has to offer: local, sustainable, boutique, first-class, innovative.

Foodies are a growing tourism segment whose main motive for choosing a holiday destination is enjoying good food and drink. They usually travel with a partner or family and, compared to other tourists, they also travel outside the main summer season and are willing to pay more for special gastronomic adventures. They like to discover something new and share their unforgettable culinary experiences on social media.



Vintage gourmet tour
 Get into a vintage car and embark on a nostalgic journey amid Istrian olive groves, taste world-class olive oils from the Lisjak family – who are one of the greatest olive-oil producers in Slovenia – and enjoy the traditional Istrian cuisine.

Photo: Matija Ščukovt/www.slovenia.info

UNIQUE CULINARY EXPERIENCES

Going to a restaurant and tasting creative dishes prepared by chefs, visiting the Open Kitchen – open-air food market with freshly prepared delicacies, going on innovative culinary walks or visiting winemakers and tasting world-class wines from the three wine-growing regions are experiences in themselves.

Unique and personalised gastronomic experiences that meet the criteria of being boutique, distinctive and

sustainable are included in the Slovenia Unique Experiences selection.

This allows the guests to enjoy unique, local, authentic, and quality personalised experiences with elements of surprise that they will remember for the rest of their lives. Such experiences address visitors who seek a genuine connection with the local community and interesting stories that touch the heart and inspire the soul. Discerning and curious visitors who crave a new adventure can rest assured that they will experience a very personal story in an original setting and in interaction with local people and guides.



Velenje underground – a gastronomic adventure 160 metres below the surface
 Enjoy a top gastronomic adventure in Slovenia's deepest dining room. Take a ride in a time machine and be a part of an underground adventure in one of the thickest coal seams in the world. Take the oldest lift in Slovenia and descend in the Coal Mining Museum of Slovenia. To get a taste of a miner's life, try the best dishes of chefs from Vila Herberstein.
 Photo: Aljoša Videtič/www.slovenia.info



GASTRONOMY

Valter Kramar, Ana Roš and Maja Pak, Director of the Slovenian Tourist Board

SIX RESTAURANTS AWARDED WITH PRESTIGIOUS MICHELIN STARS

SLOVENIA AS A SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION FOR EXQUISITE GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCES

BARBARA ZMRZLIKAR, PHOTO: MARKO OCEPEK

THE BEST-KEPT SECRET IN SLOVENIAN CUISINE OF RECENT MONTHS WAS FINALLY REVEALED AT THE MICHELIN STAR REVELATION SLOVENIA 2020 EVENT, WHICH WAS HELD AT LJUBLJANA CASTLE IN JUNE AND COMBINED BOTH LIVE AND VIRTUAL ELEMENTS. AFTER MANY GUESSES AND MUCH TENSE EXPECTATION, MICHELIN ANNOUNCED THE RESULTS OF ITS FIRST EVER RATING OF SLOVENIAN RESTAURANTS.

At the same time, Michelin confirmed its reputation of still being able to deliver a surprise despite its 120-year history. Although Slovenia was aware of the exceptional quality of its gastronomic scene, the content of THE MICHELIN GUIDE SLOVENIA 2020 exceeded all expectations.

Michelin inspectors included 52 Slovenian restaurants in their iconic guide and awarded stars to six of them.

It is an exceptional achievement that Hiša Franko, in Kobarid, received two such stars. The restaurant, run by Ana Roš, the chosen as best female chef in the world in 2017, has thus joined the rare holders of two stars around the globe.

One star for the highest quality in cuisine, which is distinguished by exceptional dishes rich in flavours and imbued with the personality of a talented chef and the emotions evoked by the tastes, was awarded to each of the following: Atelje in Ljubljana (chef Jorg Zupan), Dam in Nova Gorica (Uroš Fakuč), Vila Podvin in Radovljica (Uroš Štefelin), Gostilna pri Lojzetu in Vipava (Tomaž Kavčič) and Hiša Denk in Zgornja Kungota (Gregor Vračko).

BIBS AND PLATES

Slovenia's reputation as a top gastronomic destination was also confirmed by nine restaurants receiving the Bib Gourmand. In this category, Michelin inspectors include the gems they discover each year on their travels. These are authentic restaurants that serve high quality food with excellent value for money. In Slovenia they include: Etna (Divača), Ruj (Dol pri Vogljah), Jožef (Idrija), Na Gradu (Ljubljana), Rajh (Murska Sobota), Gostilna Mahorčič, (Rodik), Gostilna Repovž (Šentjanž), Gostišče Grič (Šentjošt nad Horjulom) and Evergreen (Smlednik).

The Michelin Guide, which is considered one of the most trusted brands in gastronomy and tourism, also included in its first Slovenia edition 37 restaurants in the Michelin Plate category.

The Michelin Plate recognises restaurants that serve carefully prepared meals made from fresh ingredients and are great destinations for diners looking for something special.

The full list of restaurants listed in THE MICHELIN GUIDE SLOVENIA 2020 is available on the official Michelin website: guide.michelin.com/si/en/restaurants.

SLOVENIA ALSO EXCELS IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABILITY

As Gwendal Poullennec, Global Director of Michelin Guides said at the launch of the iconic book for Slovenia: "Our inspectors genuinely enjoyed preparing THE MICHELIN GUIDE SLOVENIA 2020 and highlighting a destination that shines in so many ways. The selection of our inspectors shows the exceptional quality of the Slovenian culinary scene, the creativity of its talented chefs, the high quality of local ingredients and also the commitment of the chefs to a more sustainable approach to gastronomy. Our inspectors were truly happy to discover the restaurants that make Slovenia such a charming and exciting international destination, and a destination that all foodies should discover or rediscover."

He offered another surprise: Michelin recently introduced a novelty to support, encourage and promote sustainable culinary practices, a recognition of sustainability that highlights chefs and their restaurants working towards more sustainable gastronomy and consequently a more sustainable society. The Michelin Sustainability Award celebrates their courage and ingenuity reflected in the sustainable practices that they use in their everyday work, their collaboration with environ-



One Michelin star for the highest quality.

mentally conscious produce growers and their waste management. Michelin highlighted six Slovenian chefs who work in harmony with nature and who, with their innovative ideas, are looking for well thought out solutions for their restaurants every day. These are: Ana Roš (Hiša Franko), Luka Košir (Gostišče Grič), Bine Volčič (Monstera Bistro), Davide Crisci (Gostilna za Gradom), Uroš Gorjanc (Gostilna Krištof) and Ksenija Krajšek Mahorčič (Gostilna Mahorčič).

After the announcement of the results of the evaluation by Michelin inspectors, Maja Pak, Director of the Slovenian Tourist Board, noted: "It is an extraordinary success for Slovenian gastronomy that Michelin has awarded stars to as many as six restaurants from all parts of Slovenia in the very first year. Today, Slovenia is in the international spotlight thanks to its cuisine, which is among the finest in the world. The success story of Slovenian gastronomy comes right at a time when tourism is facing one of its biggest crises to date; Michelin's arrival therefore offers great encouragement and motivation on Slovenian tourism's path to recovery, and an excellent opportunity to raise

the country's profile and that of its cuisine. I am very pleased that six restaurant chefs also received the Michelin Sustainability Award, as it is an award that is not always presented. Sustainability is at the core of all our tourism activities. Slovenia has earned international recognition as a sustainable destination through the Green Scheme of Slovenian tourism, the Green Cuisine label for restaurants is being prepared, and we have adapted to current safety needs by creating Green & Safe standards.

Slovenia has earned international recognition as a sustainable destination through the Green Scheme of Slovenian tourism, the Green Cuisine label for restaurants is being prepared, and we have adapted to current safety needs by creating Green & Safe standards.

THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD

The launch of THE MICHELIN GUIDE SLOVENIA 2020 has attracted a lot of attention among the domestic and foreign public. It was launched through the social media accounts of the Slovenian Tourist Board and Michelin.

The results thus reached millions in the virtual world in just a few days, while further announcements in the foreign online media have reached well over 191 million readers.

After the official presentation of its first gastronomic guide for Slovenia, Michelin published the MICHELIN GUIDE MAIN CITIES OF EUROPE 2020, which is a compilation of excellent ideas for unforgettable culinary experiences in European capitals and large cities boasting restaurants with Michelin stars. This year's edition of the guide includes more than 1,850 restaurants in 39 cities and 23 countries. It mentions Ljubljana as a city with its first one-star Michelin restaurant, Atelje, along with Bib Gourmand (Na Gradu) and The Plate (AS, B-Restaurant, Cubo, Harfa, JB, Maxim, Monstera Bistro, Separé, Shambala, Strelec, Sushimama, Valvas'or and Vander).

You can find out more about Slovenian cuisine on the new website: www.tasteslovenia.si.





GASTRONOMY

The Butul family.
Photo: Jaka Jeraša

TRADITION IS OUR MISSION

MEDITERRANEAN FLAVOURS OF SLOVENIAN ISTRIA

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

THE BUTUL FAMILY FROM THE VILLAGE OF MANŽAN ABOVE KOPER USES THE SLOGAN TRADITION IS OUR MISSION TO PROMOTE TRADITIONAL ISTRIAN CUISINE. THEY WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW THAT SLOVENIA IS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ALSO A MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRY.

They use an innovative, modern and unique way of making food and growing vegetables on the four hectares of land surrounding their house, preserving the tradition of producing and preparing food handed down from their nonnos – or grandfathers.

AT MY PLACE

Their son Črt started developing his passionate relationship with cuisine very early on. At fourteen he became the youngest amateur sommelier in Slovenia, but cooking has remained one of his greatest passions. When he was nineteen, he was already gaining experience all over the world, including on a luxury yacht and at a Michelin-star restaurant in Switzerland. At my place is his latest project. This is a club that is taking over Ljubljana, Amsterdam and Berlin. During the coronavirus epidemic, Črt was handing food through the window on Prešeren Street in Ljubljana, which was well received by city residents.

At my place is a platform of creativity, where the cuisine on offer is refined by art exhibitions and music events.

In the tasting room, which can accommodate a small number of people, guests can try Črt's dishes and the Butul family wine, distributed under the Butul Wine Selection brand, following the slow-food principle. Alongside cooking, which he loves, Črt is also interested in many other things. He studied international relations, honed himself as a journalist, tried getting into an acting academy, designed the labels for his family's products and worked as a photographer, director and web designer. Wood design is another long-standing passion, and he likes to make as many things as he can himself.

With his new project, At my place, Črt is raising debates about new culinary trends. He believes we begin eating with our eyes: if a dish is not attractive, our brain will resist it. Črt insists we must be proud of our local Slovenian food because it can easily compete with the best dishes internationally. He worries that

food is not distributed equally around the world; on the one hand, we don't know what to do with all the surpluses of food, and on the other people are starving. He swears by local seasonal produce, and he realized that during the coronavirus lockdown people became even more aware of the importance of having a local food supply. So he uses every occasion to encourage people to avoid long retail chains.

Črt, his mother Tatjana and father Mitja also like to travel, and they bring new flavours, spices and recipes home from their journeys. They spend their winters in Sri Lanka, where, among other things, they also cook Istrian food at a five-star hotel owned by the honorary consul to Slovenia.

PROMOTING MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE

The Butuls say Slovenians are not aware enough that the coastal part of the country is actually Mediterranean, and they want to promote this around the globe. People are happy at their farm and nothing can beat the word-of-mouth recommendations of a satisfied guest. Their one-on-one approach is crucial, and most guests, most of whom are foreigners, have come to them from their organically spread reputation.

In 2010, the City of Koper held a public call for proposals for new tourism products.

The Butuls applied with their Mediterranean herb garden in Slovenian Istria, which was selected as the best product in the municipality.

They promoted their herb garden at fairs abroad, and since then they have hosted visitors from over eighty countries. After that they expanded their rooms and self-catering accommodation facilities, with people visiting them for workshops, holidays, herb garden tours and so on. Ever more new guests continue to arrive, expanding the circle of visitors.

THE HIDDEN GEM PACKAGE

The Butul restaurant ranks third in the Coastal-Karst region and their agritourism offer ranks third in Slovenia. In 2018, the Butul Farm also won first place in Radio SI's project Slovenia's hidden gems, which promotes excellent tourism products and packages that provide the best of what the various Slovenian regions, from Prekmurje to the Littoral, have to offer. Their winning project was Mediterranean Flavours of Slovenian Istria, which serves as a platform for connecting cuisine, art and wellness, and a point of contact with the local providers and local experiences.

The Butuls offer days of work and entertainment at their farm, including Mediterranean cuisine workshops, outdoor accommodation, sauna therapy, pampering in a hot tub, accommodation with local seasonal breakfast, accommodation in large luxury tents, slow-food dinners, wild plant foraging workshops, harvesting olives, help on the farm, a guided tour of hidden rural gems (outdoors and in the village) and truffle hunting.



Their guests can also take part in seasonal farm work.
Photo: Personal archives

In addition, their guests can also take part in seasonal farm work, such as beekeeping, harvesting olives, pruning trees, making hay, gardening, cleaning herbs, picking grapes and bottling and preserving the Butul Selection products. The Butuls offer them a hot afternoon Field Snack, allowing their guests to eat and drink just like the farmers on the Istrian fields used to in the past, providing them an explanation and modern interpretation of the meals that people used to have out in the fields. They also cook out over an open fire, and give workshops on how to prepare food in this way.

THE MEDITERRANEAN HERB GARDEN

The central part of the Butul Farm is their world-renowned herb garden, where guests can admire over fifty varieties of herbs and aromatic plants, various vegetables, and 300 olive trees, enjoying the scents of the sea and Mediterranean. They can also try the olives and olive oil, Malvasia and Refosco wines, and exquisite local food.

With a great deal of voluntary work and assistance from the Municipality of Koper, the Butuls worked the land and planted the garden ten years ago, calling it a Mediterranean herb garden in Slovenian Istria. They planted it with dozens of Mediterranean herbs and vegetables, which they fertilise with horse manure. The garden is open to visitors from May to September. Tours accompanied by culinary workshops focusing on herbs can be booked even outside these months.

All visitors are offered fresh bread after their tour, accompanied by herb specialties that will delight all tastes. The Butuls take you for a walk among the scents and flavours of the sea, olive groves, vineyards, meadows and gardens, from where the view extends all the way to Mount Triglav.

They have built oases of herbs on their property, guiding their guests from one to another, teaching them about the wild herbs, honey, bees and oil. After that the visitors can also taste everything, including the fermented purslane, which they pick in the summer. In the end, they also tell their visitors what recipes they make with the plants they have seen. At the very beginning, the family decided to create an educational farm and pass their knowledge onto others. They see no sense in keeping it for themselves. Visitors can also choose to purchase a

wide selection of excellent jams, sauces, tinctures, oils, wines and syrups made by Tatjana.

NOWHERE WITHOUT OLIVE OIL

Olive oil accompanies them at all times, and they travel nowhere without it. Their suitcases thus always contain oil, wine and salt. It is their firm belief that Slovenians have one of the best salts in the world: the Sečovlje salt. It gives food a completely different flavour and, as they say, it enriches everything. When they put it on the table and their foreign guests try it, they immediately become hooked. This is how they bring people to Slovenia.

And that's exactly their goal: to provide visitors with the opportunity of a combined holiday and business trip.

Using this type of promotion for Slovenia and Slovenian Istria, they have already brought many international visitors to the country. One of their culinary specialties is tea in cheese, and they developed this for about five years. Their cheeses originate from Staro Selo and Mount Matajur, and are made with the Sečovlje salt and herbs from their Mediterranean garden, such as lavender and rosemary, or something else that they add to the cheese. Like black tea, for instance. This cheese is delicious.

There is no end to the work on the farm, neither outdoors nor in the kitchen. Whatever is currently growing ends up in their pots. There is no meat on the farm that would wait in the freezer. People that visit them can explore those items that are always on the table and seasonal. When asparagus is in season, they make dishes from asparagus, and when the time is right, they cook with beans or persimmons. The Mediterranean climate allows them to have something fresh in their garden throughout the year. The Butuls invite their guests to join them in their daily chores, allowing them to experience a part of their everyday life, or simply to join them for a chat. And many of them come back for another happy day there. It is a true joy to see how the two generations of the Butuls have so tastefully merged traditional ingredients and techniques with forward-thinking approaches, showing the world the Mediterranean flavours of Slovenian Istria.



Črt is raising debates about new culinary trends.
Photo: Dušan Arzenšek



They also give workshops on how to prepare food.
Photo: Personal archives



GASTRONOMY

Darinko Ribolica in the wine cellar of Klet Brda winery.

DARINKO RIBOLICA

THE MAIN OENOLOGIST AT THE KLET BRDA WINERY

POLONA PREŠEREN, PHOTO: KLET BRDA WINERY ARCHIVES

SLOVENIA IS A SMALL COUNTRY, BUT AT THE SAME TIME A VERY DIVERSE ONE. THIS IS ALSO TRUE OF SLOVENIAN WINES AND WINEMAKERS, WHICH IS WHY THERE IS A BROAD RANGE OF WINES AVAILABLE IN THE COUNTRY. WE SPOKE ABOUT THIS WITH DARINKO RIBOLICA, THE MAIN OENOLOGIST AT THE KLET BRDA WINERY.

Slovenians are very proud of the wines they produce. What inspires you the most as an expert in domestic wines?

In Slovenia, we have everything from wines produced in a warm, Mediterranean climate to those produced in an entirely continental one. I can say that wines from the Primorska region are full of sun and the proximity of the sea can be felt, which is why these usually have a higher alcohol content. Their aromas resemble southern aromas, i.e. tropical fruit and overripe fruit, such as peaches or apricots. If we go deeper into the centre of Slovenia, to the Dolenjska region where the climate is more continental, the wines have more freshness and their fruity aromas are much more European, with apples, pears and cherries prevailing. If we go closer to the Štajerska region, the acidity level goes up a bit and the aromas are even more pronounced due to the bigger temperature difference between day and night. On the nose, these wines are always very expressive, with notes of green fruits – peppers, green chillies, elderberries, green apples. You can feel this freshness in the taste and also the aftertaste, which is usually based on a higher acidity level. This is why wines from Štajerska are generally more fragrant, more acidic, but with a thinner body.

The wines from Primorska, which includes wines from Goriška Brda, are more corpulent, richer, more structured, full.

To sum up, the wines from Primorska, Goriška Brda, the Vipava Valley and from Koper are richer, more structured, the higher temperature of the climate is noticeable, the wines have more alcohol. The wines from Dolenjska and Štajerska are more fragrant, more acidic, with a more expressive taste.

How has globalisation influenced Slovenian winemakers and the production of wine?

We began to notice this influence in the Klet Brda winery when we decided to start exporting our wines. All of a sudden, we realised that further west they have a completely different perspective of what makes a top-quality wine. We realised they are looking for wines that are different from those we had in Slovenia in the 1990s. The West, if I can call it that, was mainly looking for freshness,

fruitiness, purity, fullness. Wines without any anomalies. Primarily wines that are sellable.

In China, on the other hand, they swear by red wines. But even in terms of red wines they are looking for two different things – wines that resemble French wines or wines from California, Chile, Australia, which are dark, alcoholic, rich, structured. The kind that are blockbusters. We mostly export the styles from the A Plus and Baggeri lines to China, which means strong colour, strong aromas, higher alcohol content, long aftertastes; these are the blockbuster wines that the Chinese are looking for. These are completely different wines from those that are popular in the West.

The Klet Brda winery has been loyal to its story for years, and the Quercus brand itself, which has been on the market for 20 years, is solid proof of that. Where do you think the reasons for this success lie? What are the highlights of the story, so far?

The Quercus brand was first presented to the Slovenian market two decades ago, but we quickly started considering exporting and we wanted a brand that would represent Goriška Brda in all its diversity.

As such, there are 11 different wines in the Quercus brand. The story of the brand is one about young, fresh wines, which are the most sought after in the West.

All white wines from this brand, Rebula, Sauvignonasse, Pinot Bianco and Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay and Moscato-Verduzzo, are fermented in stainless steel tanks which means there is no contact with wood. They have fresh, fruity and extremely pure notes, as are typical of specific varieties of wine. These wines enter the market within one or two years of being produced and are also drunk in this sort of period. The key highlights of this story are that we were able to produce very popular wines that people buy when looking for freshness, fruitiness, elegance, something very drinkable. No weird smells that would demand explanations or indicate a different oenological approach, but truly wines that resemble the grapes of the varieties they were made of.

Despite its large size, the Klet Brda winery are is extremely flexible. How do you adapt to market demands?

The Klet Brda winery functions and operates as a small winery, even though it is very big, owned by 400 wine-making families from Goriška Brda. Everything, of course, starts in the vineyard. We have two agronomists that monitor and advise farmers on how to cut and how much to burden the vines, where to plant individual varieties and so on. They also take samples for monitoring the maturing of grapes, and this is how we determine the optimal time for harvesting. The whole harvest is planned in detail.

What is my role in this? I work closely with our agronomists, since the quality of the wine starts in the vineyard. Several times per year, and almost every day before the harvest, I go to the vineyards with them. After the harvest, my role is to monitor and order quick processing and the manner of fermentation of the grape – either in stainless steel tanks or wooden barrels – to determine which yeast is the best for individual varieties and later to monitor the fermentation of all wines. In the wine cellar, we have thousands of containers that are tested at least once daily during the fermentation, which is how we monitor the process of fermentation. My work also entails the constant monitoring of quality, preparation of varieties, preparation of basic lines. The work is very diverse and no two days are the same, since not even one harvest is the same as another. It is varied, demanding and creative work.

What is more important for the production of wine: following your own story or the demands of the market?

Both are important – you need to follow your own story, but you absolutely need to follow the market's demands as well. I think this depends very much on the size of the wine cellar. If you are a small producer, you can build everything from your own story, but every such proprietary wine demands very detailed explanations on why it is proprietary. In the Klet Brda winery, we have two such stories that are unique and special. The story of Motnik and of wines De Baguer, both are based on new ideas. The rest of our wines are actually produced following global market demands. If you want to export and be successful on the international market, you need to sell wines that give consumers what they want.

In Goriška Brda, the natural potential is so big that we are able to achieve such a high quality, one that is also widely recognised.

So, you can follow your own story or you can follow market demands. However, if you are a big producer, most of your wines must follow market demands because otherwise you cannot sell the wine.

The quality of Slovenian wines has increased dramatically in the last two decades. Where do you think there may still be room for improvement?

It's true, the quality really has improved. I think the turning point was when the Klet Brda winery started cooperating with foreign oenologists – and not just us, certain wine cellars from Štajerska also did so – and we began to change our perception of wine. We focused more on the vineyards. Small crops at select locations, grapes harvested at just the right moment, produced in an appropriate manner... All of these elements can be further developed and the whole of (winemaking) Slovenia is working very hard to do so.

Where could we move even further forward? We lack promotion. We really don't have a single, unified means of promoting Slovenian wines in the world. We should present ourselves as a country, a country that is extremely diverse and where quality is right at home. Investments should be made in a board that would represent Slovenia on foreign markets and hold presentations across the globe. So, much more investment in marketing and in the image of Slovenia in order for us to be recognisable as a great wine-producing country, one synonymous with excellent wines.

How important is it to tell the story behind the wine to the consumer?

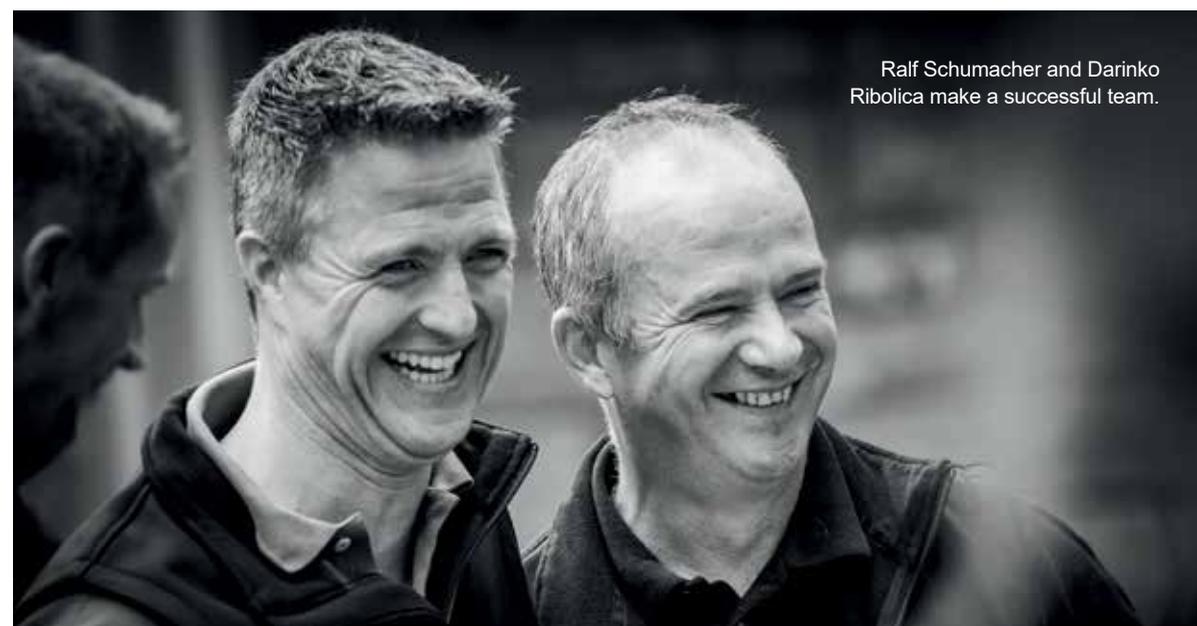
It's very important, since every consumer wants to be impressed and wants to know why they should buy a certain wine and what is special about it. Quality is another aspect that is very important, but it must be based on other things, too, and they must be intertwined in the story. In Goriška Brda, this is the story of farmers that work, learn, listen to all our wishes, are ready to spend long days in the vineyard for the grapes and do everything necessary to offer the fruit to the sun and prepare it for the production of excellent wine. Therefore, the whole story, connected to the tradition of the wine cellar and individual producers, presents the wine in a better light and adds value to it.

At the Klet Brda winery, you recently surprised us with the news that you would be collaborating with Ralf Schumacher to produce the Schumacher Selection wine. What does this partnership look like?

Collaboration with Ralf began in a very interesting way. He tried our Quercus Rebula in one of the Salzburg restaurants, that impressed him so much that he decided to visit us. And his excellent experience with Rebula led him to creating his own label with his name. He wanted a simple, fresh and drinkable wine, just like our Quercus Rebula, signed with his name for his own brand.

So, our cooperation began with Rebula and with each of his visits to the Klet Brda winery we had tastings of our other wines and added other varieties to the line, such as Sauvignon and Pinot Noir, to name just two.

And, of course, sparkling wines. Ralf is a fine connoisseur and has distinctly German views of wine, so here we're engaged in a constant battle with Ralf about what a certain wine should look like (laughs). But by both sides making compromises, we produce wines that are good for him and for us, too. His whole brand is, in a way, adapted to the German market. But in the end, the goal we share is always to produce the best wines.



Ralf Schumacher and Darinko Ribolica make a successful team.



It's 20 years since the Quercus brand was launched.



HERITAGE

Today the Žiče Charterhouse is used as a venue for weddings, cultural and other events.
Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



The architectural appearance of the Stična Abbey has changed over the centuries – today it bears traces of the Baroque, Romanesque and Gothic styles. The oldest core of the monastery, consisting of the famous cloister and abbey church, has been preserved in good condition to the present day.
Photo: Aljoša Rehar/STA

SLOVENIAN MONASTERIES

PLACES OF PRAYER, ART AND HARMONY WITH NATURE

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

MONASTERIES SEEM TO BE A REMNANT OF SOME DISTANT PAST, BUT THERE ARE QUITE A FEW THAT ARE STILL VERY MUCH ALIVE. SLOVENIA HAS 42 OPERATING MONASTERIES, 14 THAT HAVE BEEN CLOSED DOWN, AND SOME MONASTERIES THAT HAVE FALLEN INTO RUIN.

The oldest monastery in Slovenia is the Stična Abbey, the only operating Cistercian monastery in Slovenia. In addition to the Stična Abbey, some of the most beautiful and interesting monasteries in Slovenia include the Cistercian Monastery in Kostanjevica na Krki, the Franciscan Monastery in Ljubljana – the Franciscan Church of the Annunciation, the Žiče Charterhouse, the Jurklošter Charterhouse, the Ursuline Monastery of Ljubljana, the Studenice Dominican Monastery, the Franciscan Monastery in Maribor, the Križanke Monastery in Ljubljana, the Minorite Monastery and Church of St Peter and Paul in Ptuj, the Bistra Carthusian Monastery, the Rajhenburg Trappist Monastery, the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Trinity in the Slovenske Gorice hills, the Dominican Monastery in Radlje ob Dravi, the Capuchin Monastery in Celje, the Pleterje Charterhouse, the Olimje Minorite Monastery, the Benedictine Monastery in Gornji Grad, the Kostanjevica Franciscan Monastery

near Nova Gorica, and the Minorite Monastery of St Francis in Piran.

ACTIVE COEXISTENCE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

With the exception of monasteries that have no contact with the outside world other than for the purposes of obtaining vital necessities, Slovenian monasteries are very much involved, directly or indirectly, in the lives of the places where they are located.

They are typically involved in activities such as cultural activities, work

with young people, charitable activities, and, for example, herbal medicine.

The **Stična Abbey** is the oldest monastery in Slovenia, established around 1132. It was here that the famous Manuscript of Stična, one of the first texts in the Slovenian language, was written in 1428. Priests devote their time to work and prayer; the monastery is known for herbal medicine; a number of books of Father Simon Ašič (who had great knowledge of healing herbs) have been published on natural medicines for physical and psychological illnesses. Every year, a traditional event called Stična of the Youth is held in Stična, attracting thousands of young Slovenians, who come to socialise and deepen their faith.

Due to its strict rules regarding monastic life, the **Pleterje Charterhouse** is closed to the public. Since entering the Charterhouse is not allowed, visitors can see the depiction of the life of the Carthusians in the Gothic church; there is also an open-air museum ex-

hibiting typical farmhouses and associated outbuildings from the Sentjernef field.

The **Franciscan Monastery** – the Church of the Annunciation is located on the main square in the centre of Ljubljana. It is one of the most popular monasteries among Ljubljana residents, as monks devote considerable time to young people and those with disabilities, and also hold a number of cultural events, run the parish choir, and so on. The monastery is featured on many postcards. It boasts a Baroque altar made by famous sculptor Francesco Robba.

The **Olimje Minorite Monastery** is located near Terme Olimia. The mighty Church of Mary's Assumption, boasting one of the most beautiful Baroque (Rococo) altars in Slovenia, was added to the monastery, which was initially a castle. The Pauline Fathers also built a pharmacy, which is one of the oldest in Europe.

The **Kostanjevica na Krki Monastery** is another interesting Cistercian monastery. It was built in 1234 and ceased to operate in 1745. Since 1974 it has housed the Božidar Jakac Gallery, which brings this exceptional cultural monument to life. The monastery's gardens are decorated by wooden sculptures created under the



The Franciscan Monastery and Church of St James has a rich Library.
Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



The Minorite Monastery of St Peter and Paul in Ptuj was founded in 1239. The ancient yard is often used as a venue for cultural events; the monastery has a well-stocked library; there is also the typical statue of the Virgin Mary and child Jesus dating from the 13th century.
Photo: Mankica Kranjec

auspices of the International Symposia of Sculptors called Forma Viva. Although there are no longer any monks here, the monastery is very much alive, resonating with its artistic message.

The **Križanke (Knights of the Cross) Monastery in Ljubljana** is organised in a similar way. The original Gothic church was rebuilt in the Baroque style around 1714. The church was designed by Venetian architect Domenico Rossi. The monastery's interior also includes the Knights' Hall, since the monastery complex originally belonged to the German Order of the Knights of the Cross. Between 1952 and 1955, the monastery complex was renovated and redesigned according to plans made by the famed Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik. One of the city's most beautiful and picturesque settings, the Križanke complex often serves as the venue for major cultural events, such as the Ljubljana Summer Festival.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A TOURIST VISIT

Churches and monasteries in Slovenia are places of faith and testaments to the history of monastic life, and are remarkable for their architecture and paintings.

There are around 3,000 religious buildings in Slovenia.

Due to their beauty and the rich content some monasteries have managed to preserve over the centuries, such places are also ideal for family visits, providing an opportunity for socialising and learning. Or you may simply enjoy the peace and quiet they provide.

THE THERAPEUTIC POWER OF ART IN TIMES OF CRISIS

OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE CONCEPTS

ANJA KOVAČ

THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC WAS DECLARED IN SLOVENIA ON 12 MARCH AND LASTED UNTIL 31 MAY 2020. DURING THIS PERIOD ALL PUBLIC LIFE WAS AT A STANDSTILL, INCLUDING CULTURAL EVENTS. GALLERIES, MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND MANY OTHER INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING SPIRITUAL FOOD WERE THUS CLOSED.

CULTURE

Photo: Image Source-GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto

To deal with these difficult times, artists, institutions and their content moved to the Internet, and the great number of people who followed them online showed that in a crisis art is indispensable and can bring great consolation.

After the epidemic we asked five Slovenian authors, who also play other roles in their professional lives, what art meant to them during the crisis and why people need it.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

Mojca Širok, journalist, foreign policy reporter for the national television, writer and author of the best selling crime novel *Pogodba* (The Contract, Mladinska knjiga, 2018)

"We have heard many times that fiction is truer than reality. This is probably because by means of fiction we can look at reality through glasses that do not hurt. Some things that happen to you in reality hurt you. But if you look at things you know through literature, it is easier to accept them and because you have no emotional wall you also understand them better."

In a crisis, art is a lifeline. It takes us to worlds that are unreachable during a crisis.



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

Alojz Ihan, immunologist, professor at the Ljubljana Faculty of Medicine, writer and author of the collection of essays *Čas nesmrtnosti* (The Time of Immortality, Beletrina, 2016)

“As an immunologist, I see predictions of great changes as fairly exaggerated and am convinced that the current crisis will not be followed by global change. This is merely a disturbance that we will barely remember in two years. A crisis is like winter for nature. No winter stops life. It only makes the life that comes in spring even more beautiful. The same applies to art. Art is a phenomenon that exists and will continue to do so as long as humans exist, and it always finds a way to flourish in any circumstances.”

In a crisis, art is mostly an opportunity to change concepts that have been comfortable for too long. When a crisis occurs and we have to adapt, we must rid ourselves of old concepts in order to survive.



Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

Alenka Zupančič, philosopher and researcher, author of the book of essays *Konec* (The End, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo Ljubljana, 2019)

“The shape of an end can have very different, sometimes conflicting connotations. From a catastrophic, cataclysmic end, to a happy one. If we think about the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Francis Fukuyama launched his thesis on the end of history, it had all the elements of a happy ending. Now, we have been caught in the vice of the end’s double logic for some decades. Many dystopias and apocalyptic visions of the world do not arise from the notion that something will happen and the world will end. They arise because some things never end. In this sense, it seems to me that we are not living after the end of the world, but are rather stuck in a never-ending end.”

Despite art being proverbially mad, in a crisis it is something that helps us keep our sanity, humanity and spirit.

Mojca Kumerdej, writer, publicist, recipient of a Prešeren Fund Prize for the novel *Kronosova žrtev* (The Harvest of Chronos, Beletrina, 2016), a colourful portrait of the Renaissance

“Art doesn’t have the power to abruptly change the world like natural catastrophes or political and social changes. However, it has the power to very precisely and sensitively discern certain situations in advance, predict events and also, after the fact, to bring out in the open the connections, experiences, feelings and incidents that might otherwise have remained hidden to the majority. Art can also put catastrophes and associated crises in a wider context.”

In a crisis, art is a way of spiritual survival, for both artists and consumers of art.



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

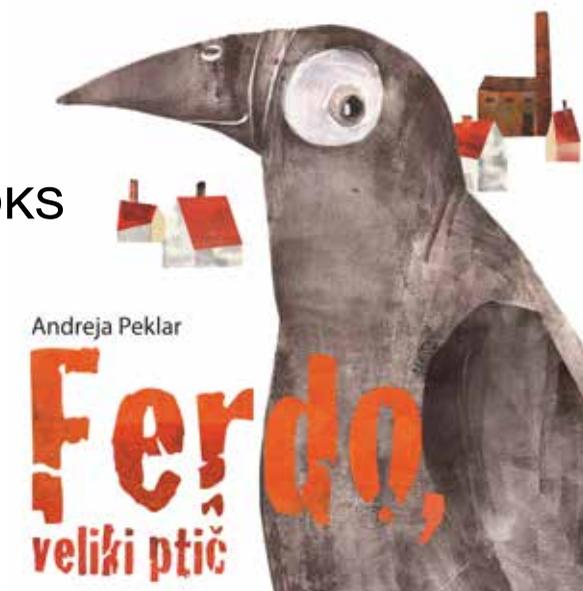
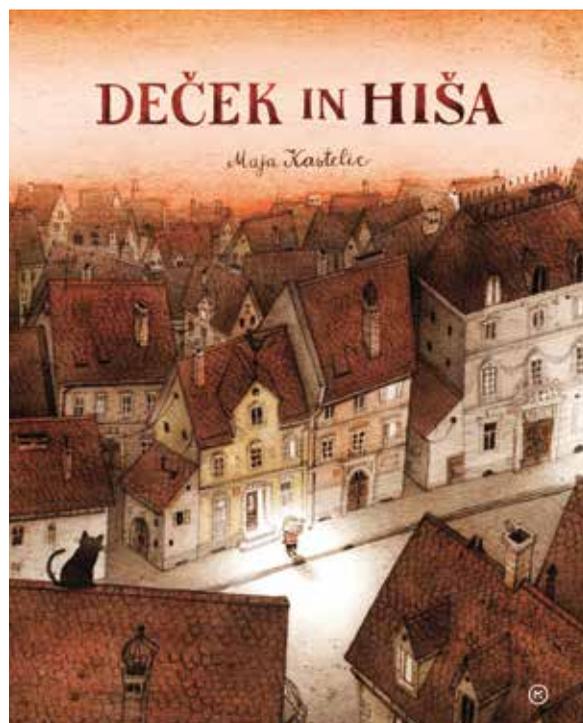
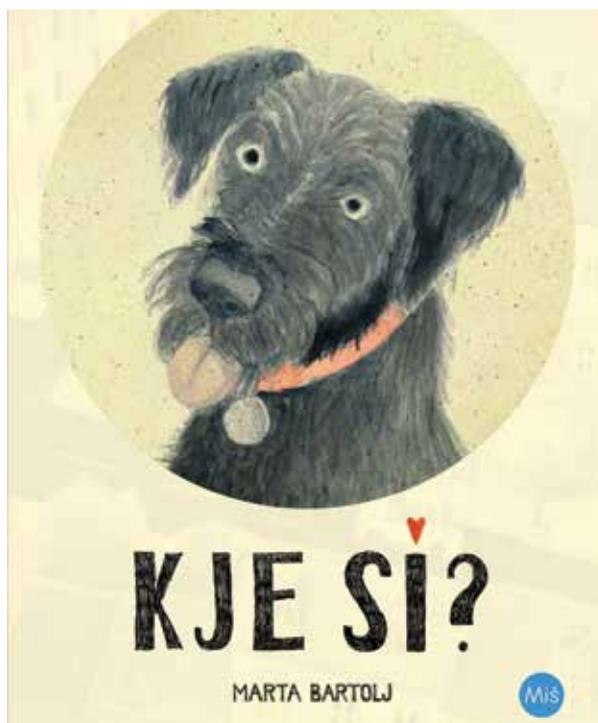
Jasmin B. Frelih, writer and translator, recipient of the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), who during the crisis made his prize-winning novel *Na/pol* (In/Half, Mladinska knjiga, 2013) available online for free

“A state of permanent isolation is unbearable for people and would be impossible without literature. Without it we would have emerged from our homes mindless creatures, torn from the flow of human history and incapable of relating to our surroundings, because literature is the memory of reason, a document of existence. Without it, we are prisoners of the moment when we wake up and forget our dreams.”

In a crisis, art is a place where eternity is not lost. A place of protection for the only true possession of a person, and a place where people are able to express their spirit.



Photo: Bor Slana/STA



LITERATURE

WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS

SOMETIMES ILLUSTRATIONS SAY MORE THAN WORDS

KATJA STERGAR. PHOTO: JAK ARCHIVES

IN RECENT YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A NOTABLE INCREASE IN WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS ON THE MARKET, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOTHING NEW. FOR EXAMPLE, IN SLOVENIA *MARUŠKA POTEPUŠKA* BY MARIJAN AMALETTI WAS PUBLISHED AS EARLY AS 1977. IT IS TRUE, HOWEVER, THAT SOME OF THE LATEST SLOVENIAN TITLES HAVE MANAGED TO ATTRACT INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION, AND OPENED THE DOOR TO MANY NEW PROJECTS.

Soon after *Maruška Potepuška* (Maruška the Wanderer), in 1978 *Brundo se igra* (Brundo Plays) by Marjan Manček was published. Then followed 30 years of silence, until in 2010 Damijan Stepančič stirred up the waters with *Zgodba o sidru* (The Story of the Anchor), with all three pioneering books published by Mladinska knjiga. Suddenly, some people started to ask a number of questions: Is it really a book if it has no words apart from the title? Isn't one of the main characteristics of picture books is that they combine illustrations and text to tell the story? But anyone looking through this book about Ljubljana's anchor would soon leave such concerns behind, as the illustrations tell the tale very eloquently.

Fortunately, such questions were not the only thing the book attracted. It also received many professional awards, such as the Hinko Smrekar Award and the Levstik Award, and was included in the collection Silent Books. Final Destination Lampedusa, which also contained *Ferdo, veliki ptič* (Ferdo, the Big Bird) by Andreja Peklar (KUD Sodobnost International, 2016). This collection was organised by the Italian Section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), which has been building a library for refugee children since 2012.

In 2019, Stepančič created his second wordless picture book, *Svetilnik* (Lighthouse), published by Miš. Unlike Maja Kastelic, whose first book *Deček in hiša* (A Boy and a House, Mladinska knjiga, 2015) opened the door wide to the publishing world, Stepančič was already an established illustrator, having proven himself in many genres. The journey abroad was a bit harder for his *Svetilnik*, however, as many foreign publishers considered his illustrations, while wonderful, to be too artistic.

Today, *Deček in hiša* is a global bestseller, published by leading publishing houses in large editions and with the title now in many languages – English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Russian and also Bulgarian and Swedish. In 2015, the illustrations were part of the central exhibition at the Bologna Children's Book Fair (the Bologna Illustrators Exhibition), and since then have been travelling around the world. The book is still receiving awards and special recognitions, such as the Hinko Smrekar Plaque, the IBBY Honour List, the White Ravens Award of the International Youth Library in Munich, the Kirkus Reviews' selection of Best Wordless Picture Books, and an article on the curated Picturebook Makers website. Due to the first-rate production of this picture book, Maja Kastelic can now make deals with the best publishers around the world, such as the Canadian Comme des géants (which received the Best Publisher Award at the 2019 Bologna Fair), as well as the Canadian Greenwood, Swiss Nord Süd, and British Walker.

Marta Bartolj is well on her way to repeating Kastelic's success with her picture book *Kje si?* (Where are you?, published by Miš, 2018). The Swiss publisher Beaschlin released the German version of the book, which immediately received excellent reviews. Entry into the Arabic and American markets has been rather different. Kalimat, a publisher from the United Arab Emirates, was so impressed by the story and illustrations that a contract was signed very quickly, even though the principal character is a dog, which is considered an impure animal in Arabic culture. Bartolj thus adapted the story so that the protagonist is now a cat. Her major breakthrough, however, was a contract with the American publisher Chronicle, which noticed the book at the Children's Book Saloon in New York. The work, with a few small adjustments, will be published under the title One Small Kindness in an impressive print run of 15,000 copies. The publisher is also interested in Bartolj's future projects.

Similar to Stepančič, Andreja Peklar was already an established illustrator when *Ferdo, veliki ptič* was published. Even before it was released, her *Ferdo, veliki ptič* was among the eight finalists in the Silent Book Contest, and as a result was included in a special exhibition at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. It was also included among 10 Best of the Best at the Hii Illustration Competition in China. It has received the Hinko Smrekar Award, the Best Designed Slovenian Book Award – Books for Children and Young Adults, the Kristina Brenkova Award (Original Slovenian Picture Book Award), the White Ravens Award of the International Youth Library in Munich, an honourable mention at the Global Illustration Awards at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and was included in the IBBY Honour List.

Wordless picture books are a unique genre. They are easily understood by everyone, but the illustrations must nevertheless be such that publishers see the potential for success in their various different markets.

So far, *Ferdo, veliki ptič* has only been published in Slovenia and Mongolia, but the work brought Peklar to the attention of foreign publishers and now it's easier to sell her other books. Moreover, the story of *Ferdo, veliki ptič* will soon appear on the stage of the Maribor Puppet Theatre, bringing the story to a new audience.

LITERATURE



Photo: Dalahaye-GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto

HIGHLIGHTS OF SLOVENIAN LITERATURE FOR FOREIGN READERS

WANT TO READ SLOVENIAN? HERE IS WHO YOU SHOULD READ THIS MONTH

ANJA KOVAČ

THIS TIME WE PRESENT A GERMAN TRANSLATION OF THE CLASSICS OF SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE: THE NOVEL ENTITLED THE PATH; A DUTCH TRANSLATION OF AN EUPL-AWARDED NOVEL BY A YOUNG SLOVENIAN AUTHOR, BLACKBERRY HEAVEN; AND AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF A *NEEDLEWORK* PICTURE BOOK BY SLOVENIAN AUTHOR AND ARCHITECT MANICA K. MUSIL, WHICH CAN BE READ BY CHILDREN ALL OVER THE WORLD.



Photo: JAK archives

Nejc Zaplotnik: *Der Weg* (AS Verlag, 2020, translation by Lars Felgner)

The Path is an autobiographical and philosophical novel by Nejc Zaplotnik, a legend of Slovenian Alpinism and the first Slovenian to summit Mount Everest. In his novel, Zaplotnik vividly describes his life path from his childhood to the summit of Mount Everest and many other achievements, sharing all his yearning to ascend peaks, countless sacrifices, exertions, camaraderie, happiness felt upon reaching the summit and sadness upon losing colleagues in climbing accidents. He gives readers a glimpse into the mountaineering world as experienced first-hand and inspiration to live a full and authentic life. This is the first German translation of this classic work of Slovenian mountaineering literature.

Nataša Kramberger: *Hemel tussen de braamstruiken* (Singel Uitgeverij/De Geus, 2019, translation by Roel Schuyt)

Blackberry Heaven. A novel in stories is the debut novel for which Nataša Kramberger, today a renowned Slovenian author, received the European Union Prize for Literature EUPL. The Dutch translation has a special place among the novel's numerous translations, since part of the story takes place in Amsterdam where Jana, a student from Slovenia, moves for her studies. This is where she meets Bepi, an old man from eastern Italy who sells live fish at a market and they begin telling each other intertwining stories that flow through village figures, urban adventures, and mystical dialects like a river toward the sea. The story never really ends, since the conclusion of the novel is at the same time the beginning. The book has also been translated into English, Italian, Serbian, Hungarian and many other European languages.



Photo: JAK archives

Manica K. Musil: *Stan the Elephant* (Windmill Books, 2020, translation by Jason Blake)

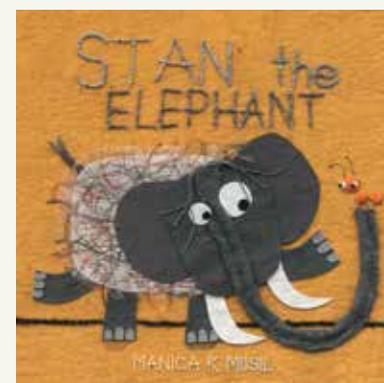


Photo: JAK archives

This is an original collage picture book by Manica K. Musil, who discovered her unique artistic expression and has been continuously receiving international awards for her work. Her picture books are read by children in China, Turkey, Switzerland, and recently also in the USA. They are a speciality on the Slovenian market. Each animal, each element is made of various materials – fabric, felt, wool, cotton wool, thread, newspaper, paper, wire, etc. There is a comic strip running along with the main story and everything together makes for an interesting, colourful and dynamic adventure.

The protagonist of this picture book is Stan the Elephant, who loves to talk but does not say much. He walks from one animal to another in search of one who would listen. When he is utterly exhausted, Stan finally notices someone who has been longing to hear his story all along.



FASHION

Jelena Proković, fashion and costume designer. In 2016 she received Slovenia's highest award for costume design – the Borštnik Prize.

CHARITY UNITES

HOW SLOVENIA'S FASHION INDUSTRY HELPED MEDICAL PERSONNEL

KATJA KRIŽNAR, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

THIS IS NOT YET ANOTHER STORY ON THE DISCOMFORT AND DISTRESS CAUSED BY THE SADLY ALL TOO FAMILIAR COVID 19. WE MAY ALL AGREE THAT THE SITUATION HAS BEEN DIFFICULT FOR MANY PEOPLE AND HAS SHAKEN OUR WORLD. BUT THIS IS A DIFFERENT STORY. THIS IS A STORY OF GOODWILL, BONDING AND CHARITY.

There are many unknown heroes who during the coronavirus crisis lent a helping hand unconditionally and without a big fuss. When the shortage of face masks became critical, a video of seamstresses at the University Medical Centre Ljubljana sewing textile face masks went viral.

Their dedication served as inspiration for many people who started to make their own face masks too.

Jelena Proković, a fashion and costume designer, went even further. The video inspired her to go and offer a helping hand to the nurses at the University Medical Centre. She even invited others to join her, among them certain well-known names in the Slovenian fashion world, and they were all happy to oblige.

She first contacted her colleague, Sanja Grcić, and suggested launching a campaign to together sew cotton face masks. There were seven volunteers in the very first group: Sanja Grcić, Maja Štamol Droljc, Edita Drpić, Slavka Pajk, Nataša Recer, Katarina Šavs and Jelena, who were very soon joined by Milena Eber.

"At the same time, to smooth out the logistics, we teamed with the Mask_Sign initiative, managed by Urška Faller Davidson. Mask_Sign is a project that was born with the intention of collectively combining knowledge and energy, and helping each other and society as a whole. Then the designers from ZOO-FA (Mojca Celin, Simona Kogovšek, Kaja Hrovat, Tina Pavlin, Renata Bedene and Nina Holc) joined the initiative, as well as fashion designer Almira Sadar. The long list of volunteers speaks for itself, and shows that good intentions and generosity bring people together", says Jelena.

In four weeks we made 7,000 masks for adults and 250 for children. We worked for around 2,000 hours and used about 500 metres of cloth, 150 meters of elastic, 12,500 metres of ribbon and 680 metres of wire.

The masks were given to the most vulnerable groups: the elderly, people with chronic illnesses, oncology patients, and pregnant women.

They were distributed to major hospitals in Slovenia, health centres, homes for the elderly, local communities and numerous associations and individuals who contacted the group on social media.

The group received a positive response from major textile suppliers and many individuals with generous hearts who helped in various ways – by paying travel expenses, donating textile and packaging material, and giving funds to buy cloth, while many people brought food and drinks, leaving them by the doors of the workshops.

"But what moved me most was the gratitude expressed by healthcare professionals from all over Slovenia. Their acknowledgement filled me with an indescribable feeling of happiness. I learned a lot from this crisis, which again showed how important it is for people to show solidarity and join forces," notes Jelena, for whom these months of isolation, despite the strain, have been unforgettable.



The masks sewn by the volunteers combine several features: they are secure and sustainable, and serve as an attractive fashion accessory.

TOGETHER WE CAN



The most popular places for domestic tourists are: Izola, Bovec, Bohinj, Kranjska Gora, Koper, Kobarid, Tolmin, Piran, Bled, Moravske Toplice, Brda and Brežice. Photo: Luka Karlin, Studio Virc/www.slovenia.info

AID FOR SLOVENIAN TOURISM TOURIST VOUCHERS

BLANKA KOŠMERLJ

THE WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION FORECASTS THAT A 60 TO 80% DECLINE IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM COULD BE RECORDED ON A GLOBAL SCALE IN 2020 AS COMPARED TO 2019. MILLIONS OF JOBS AROUND THE WORLD ARE AT RISK IN TOURISM, AS IT IS ONE OF THE MOST LABOUR-INTENSIVE BUSINESS SECTORS.

In Slovenia, tourism is also the business activity most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to operations in this sector coming temporarily to a complete halt, which will have a significant impact on the entire Slovenian economy, given that a 10% share of national GDP is attributed to the revenue raised by tourism, while some 72% of tourist overnight stays were generated by foreigners in 2019. A drop of about 70% is expected in the number of foreign tourist overnight stays this year as compared to 2019, which was a record year for Slovenian tourism. The industry's recovery will be a long one, taking up to five years according to some estimates.

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia thus prepared certain measures to help the Slovenian economy and tourism, which were adopted by the National Assembly. It is expected that these will help mitigate the downturn and preserve many jobs in tourism and related activities.

TOURIST VOUCHERS

One of the measures includes the allocation of tourist vouchers to all Slovenian citizens and foreign permanent residents with the aim of stimulating domestic tourism consumption.

All residents of the Republic of Slovenia received these vouchers (citizens under the age of 18 in the amount of EUR 50, and those above the age of 18 in the amount of EUR 200).

The vouchers can be used at accommodation facilities in Slovenia by 31 December 2020. They can be used for accommodation or accommodation with breakfast, and may be used in instalments and at different providers. Vouchers can also be transferred between the beneficiary's second degree relatives in a straight line, and thus between parents and children, grandparents and children, between spouses or partners and between children and their legal guardians. Vouchers can't be transmitted between brothers and sisters or cousins.

As per the law, a voucher may be transferred only once, i.e. in its total value. If the beneficiary has already partly used the voucher, the remaining amount cannot be transferred. If the voucher is not used for a service by 31 December 2020, the remuneration of the voucher in cash cannot be requested.

Vouchers may be used in any accommodation facility in Slovenia that is entered in the Business Register and the Register of Accommodation Facilities. They are accepted by providers of accommodation in hotels and similar facilities, holiday homes and resorts, tourist farms with accommodation facilities, private accommodation providers, mountain huts, youth hostels, caravan parks, campsites and some other short-term accommodation facilities.

If the service is paid for with the voucher, the service provider must not charge a higher price for the same type of service than it would if the payment were made by another means. The providers are not obliged to accept tourist vouchers, but we are certain that the majority will do so as they will subsequently receive payment from the state, and they will also wish to accommodate guests who will want to return in the future if they enjoy a pleasant stay and an interesting experience.

The measure was introduced in order to reduce the negative consequences of the epidemic in tourism, improve the economic situation of tourist providers, promote domestic consumption and preserve jobs in tourism and related activities. In addition, we wish to boost the development of Slovenian tourism in accordance with the set strategy and vision. The measure also has a very important multiplicative effect on many other business activities related to tourism.

Furthermore, the aim of this measure is to ensure that as many Slovenian citizens as possible learn about their country from a tourist perspective, explore its hidden attractions and experience the new, innovative tourist products emerging in all corners of Slovenia. The effects have already been felt. The highest level of interest has so far been shown in accommodation facilities on the Slovenian coast, in the mountains and natural health resorts. There is also great demand for active holidays and boutique accommodations, that used to be booked mainly by foreign tourists. It is expected that tourist service providers will prepare interesting and appealing tourist packages for diverse target groups, which will also attract domestic tourists.



TOURISM

THE TIME IS NOW CAMPAIGN

MY SLOVENIA ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO EXPLORE SLOVENIA

LIVIJA KOVAČ KONSTATINVIČ, PHOTO: SLOVENIAN TOURIST BOARD ARCHIVES

THE CAMPAIGN THE TIME IS NOW. MY SLOVENIA. SUCCESSFULLY CONNECTS ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN TOURISM AND HIGHLIGHTS THE UNIQUE TOURIST EXPERIENCES OF THE WHOLE OF SLOVENIA

On 14 May 2020, the Slovenian Tourist Board (STB) presented the Slovenia-wide motivational campaign The time is now. My Slovenia, in which the STB invites the people of Slovenia to enjoy a holiday at home and share their experiences with the hashtag #mojaslovenija.

INVOLVEMENT OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN TOURISM

This is the first Slovenia-wide promotional campaign that includes all stakeholders and highlights all corners of Slovenia. The campaign was encouraged and designed by the STB, and in order for it to be successful it is essential that Slovenian guests are addressed along with the campaign partners in a unified and united manner, with an umbrella slogan and joint creative design and visuals which have already become recognisable among the public. Ever since its launch, the campaign has received excellent responses from tourism partners, the media and the target audience. All 35 leading tourist destinations from all four macro regions of Slovenia, all prominent institutions of Slovenian tourism, numerous providers, as well as various media have joined the campaign in a variety of ways.

SLOVENIA OFFERS UNIQUE EXPERIENCES AND MANY OF THEM REMAIN UNDISCOVERED

The aim of the campaign is to inspire Slovenians to get to know their country even better, on either shorter or longer holidays, and thus increase the number of overnight stays that Slovene guests spend in their own country. Slovenia is the only European nation that is home to the Alps and Mediterranean, the Karst and Pannonian Plain. It offers exceptional opportunities for a variety of active experiences by the sea, lakes or mountains, unique glamping locations in nature, spas, and top gastronomic adventures for every taste, while visitors can also choose to explore its old town centres or a combination of the above.

With its diversity, Slovenia offers a wide range of products and experiences, as well as the possibility to enjoy an active holiday in all season.

The STB started its campaign on the domestic market during the epidemic, when it addressed the people of Slovenia with stories of local destinations and providers, and encouraged them to spend their holidays at home when conditions allow. In the introductory inspirational video, Now is the time for you, my Slovenia, the STB highlighted the vision and overarching message of Slovenia as a green, safe and hospitable holiday destination. Simultaneously with the reopening of tourist facilities and providers for business, the STB addressed its home audience with messages and videos in which are highlighted the diversity of Slovenia, its tourism offers and destinations.

INTENSIVE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The STB is conducting the campaign through numerous communication channels and platforms, encouraging Slovenians to spend their holidays at home with various communication tools: the Feel Slovenia social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube), the Slovenian web portal Slovenia.info, a special landing page, as well as targeted newsletters. All partners participating in the campaign also share messages on their social media platforms. The posts made by the ambassadors of the campaign are especially popular. On the special landing page for My Slovenia, video invitations are posted by famous Slovenians and workers in the tourism sector who are involved in creating the range of products and services on offer in the many tourist destinations the country has.

Indeed, the response of famous Slovenians and the welcoming faces of Slovenian tourism, which were drawn to taking part in the campaign because of the destinations, has been incredible.

In the videos, they share how they experience Slovenia, what their favourite places in the country are, and why it is an excellent destination for a holiday. The STB shares these videos on its social media platforms and also posts them on the YouTube channel Feel Slovenia.

I FEEL
SLOVENIA

ZDAJ JE ČAS.
Za zelene počitnice.

Moja Slovenija

#ifeelsLOVEnia #mojaslovenija

The campaign is achieving excellent results. By combining a universal call to action and creative content with intensive communication on the STB's own websites, as well as on other digital media platforms, the use of the hashtag #mojaslovenija on Instagram saw a rise of 240% in the first weeks of the campaign. Since the launch of the My Slovenia, the traffic to content in Slovenian on www.slovenia.info increased by 48% over the 14-day period before the launch of the campaign.

With the campaign My Slovenia, the Slovenian tourism sector encourages Slovenians to become more familiar with their country and, furthermore, to build trust and a long-term relationship that will be reflected not only in the increased number of overnight stays made by Slovenians this year, but also in the future. Additional encouragement is being provided by tourist vouchers and safe and attractive tourist offers which were created by service providers and associations with the support of local tourism organisations and other participants in the sector.

www.slovenia.info



TOURISM

MITJA LAVTAR HAS VISITED EVERY SETTLEMENT IN SLOVENIA

HE INVITES OTHERS TO DISCOVER SLOVENIA, TOO

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

MITJA LAVTAR FROM THE GORENJSKA REGION IS THE FIRST PERSON WHO CAN TRULY DECLARE THAT HE HAS BEEN ALL OVER SLOVENIA. IN HIS NATIVE VILLAGE OF SPODNJE DUPLJE, HE RECENTLY COMPLETED HIS FIVE-AND-A-HALF-YEAR LONG SLOVENIA PROJECT, WHICH TOOK HIM TO ALL 6,036 SETTLEMENTS IN THE COUNTRY. HE STRESSES THAT ALL CORNERS OF SLOVENIA ARE INTERESTING, AND INVITES PEOPLE TO DISCOVER THEM TOO.

Slovenia is on the threshold of summer. What would be your advice to those who live here at the unusual moment, after the coronavirus crisis?

Since flight connections are suspended and travel abroad is generally difficult, this is a perfect chance to explore Slovenia, which we have maybe always left aside or discovered only on day trips.

If we add the government vouchers that will cover a part of our holiday costs, we are about to experience a Slovenian summer.

My advice to families is to base themselves in an interesting yet still unknown part of the country and explore the surrounding sights. Very beautiful yet frequently overlooked locations include the Banjšice and Trnovo plateau, Koroška, Zasavje, Dolenjska with vineyard cottage tourism, Bizeljsko/Kozjansko, Jeruzalem and its surroundings, tiny villages in the hinterland of the Slovenian coast, Solčavsko, Goričko and more. I also suggest that they make their holiday active, talk to people, taste local specialties and visit an event or two.

As a very experienced guide, you know a lot about tourists. What do you think of Slovenians as travellers?

Statistics shows that about two thirds of Slovenia's residents take private trips each year, while three fourths go on holiday. Globally speaking, we are quite a nation of travellers, although some nations in Europe, Scandinavians, for instance, are more likely to travel than us. Most Slovenians spend their holiday in Croatia; the sea and coast seem to be the most attractive locations. Some also holiday in spas, mountain and ski resorts. I think Slovenians are quite active holidaymakers – cycling, trekking, boating, we always find something to do. Croatians say that Slovenians are always climbing something. It makes us feel somewhat guilty to just lie on the beach doing nothing. Some people even find it so difficult to be alone with themselves or their family that they end their holiday early and go back home. On top of this, Slovenians like to have a drink or two while on vacation.

How would you briefly describe Slovenia to a foreigner?

When we describe Slovenia to others, we quickly put ourselves in the role of promoters of our homeland and start praising it at length, which I find very nice, to be honest. This is, in fact, the strongest form of promotion, besides the positive opinions of those who have visited it. I have not yet met a group of people that praises their own country so much. Perhaps others do not find it necessary because their homelands are well-known from films, books and the media. This is also due to Slovenia's small size, as we all want people to know it and visit one day.

I describe Slovenia as green, adventurous, hospitable, safe, delicious, active, uncrowded ... but by no means small.

Indeed, one thing that Project Slovenia has made me realise is that these things are all relative.

So it is not necessary to go to the other end of the world to have a good adventure – we can also experience really exceptional things in Slovenia as well?

Yes, and realise that in today's globally connected world I have more in common with people sharing my hostel room in Sydney or Reykjavik than with an old lady on her Kozjansko homestead.

During the Slovenia Project, you realised that the concept of foreignness is not necessarily tied to countries as political entities, but that you can also easily be a foreigner as a Slovenian in Slovenia.

Indeed. Sometimes your registration plate already defines you as a foreigner, which I found in particular in my explorations just after the end of the prohibition of movement outside one's municipality as a response to the Covid-19 situation. Hundreds of variables can be used to compare homeland and abroad, which are both very relative notions. I have travelled to almost a hundred countries and experienced civilisation spans from stone age cultures to cities ten years ahead.

The main difference, however, is that travelling in Slovenia, where your knowledge of language and, partly, culture is good, gives you a much better opportunity to be a part of stories that can be completely foreign.

A citizen of Kranj, for instance, will find pig slaughtering in Štajerska or a funeral ceremony in Sulawesi a completely alien experience. At a pig slaughtering, however, you have a better understanding of the events and come closer to people. I can therefore conclude that Slovenians on an adventure in Slovenia can experience even more than abroad.

What would you add to the domestic tourist products and services, what is missing?

The market is basically the result of supply and demand, and we could say that if guests are not demanding more, then it makes no sense to innovate, because they are more or less satisfied. Innovation in supply, however, can stimulate demand and bring new groups of tourists, which is why we need to be in touch with global trends or even set them. I therefore greatly appreciate Dejan Križaj and the Bank of Tourism Potentials of Slovenia, a project of the Slovenian Tourist Board that promotes innovation in Slovenian tourism. My advice to Slovenian providers thus follows the same spirit: do not be afraid to introduce and test innovations, do not follow only money and greed, and especially do not be afraid of being Slovenian and offering Slovenian products.

What attracts people today is local stories, cuisine, wine, heritage and events.



"My mission is to promote the country as the best tourist destination."

People no longer travel just to tick off destinations on their bucket lists, and they avoid generic providers. They want authentic, and Slovenia can provide that.

What did you miss most when travelling to some of the remoter parts of Slovenia?

It was difficult to find local food in less visited destinations. I often had to resort to pizzas and fried food. Many settlements are without appropriate access routes, too – it's incredible how many gravel roads Slovenia still has. The interpretation of natural and cultural sights is also often lacking and unappealing.

What was your experience of the people on your trips? Is it possible to sum up some common characteristics of our nation?

As kind, interesting, hospitable, entertaining, generous, and unified – in short, much better and more united than we are taught. We are an extraordinary nation.

What's the most valuable thing you learned on your trips?

I realised that people and experiences are the most important things when travelling. And that such people and experiences can be encountered in one's own

country, municipality or even settlement. One does not have to travel to the other end of the world, and this type of trip is also much more eco-friendly.

The most fascinating places?

Goče, because the Karst streets are so romantic at night.

Strmec na Predelu, because it is the most picturesque settlement in Slovenia.

Trbovlje, because I did not imagine that industrial heritage can be cool, too.

Močunigi, because it is incredible that you have to go through Croatia to come back to a Slovenian settlement.

Piran. Because it is Piran.

And your plans for the future?

After the completion of the Slovenia Project, my mission is to promote the country as the best tourist destination among both Slovenians and foreigners. I will do this on an autumn tour of travel lectures, guided tours of Slovenia and a blog with tips on visiting various Slovenian destinations.



"I realised that people and experiences are the most important things when travelling."



TOURISM

Slovenians use their cars for 86% of their trips.
Photo: Matthew Micah Wright-GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto

TAKE A TOUR OF SLOVENIA BY CAR THE EASIEST WAY TO TRAVEL AROUND THE COUNTRY

DANILA GOLOB

THE SMALL BUT DIVERSE COUNTRY OF SLOVENIA IS A TRUE HAVEN FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO ADMIRE GREEN NATURE, LEARN ABOUT THE CULTURE OF OLD TOWNS AND DISCOVER HIDDEN GEMS, AND THE EASIEST WAY TO TRAVEL AROUND IS BY CAR. MORE THAN THAT, CARS ALSO PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY.

In 2015, the industry generated almost a billion euros in revenue with the sale of the cars it produced. The majority of the cars made in Slovenia are exported, mainly to Germany, France and Italy. Such sales accounted for 1.6 billion euros in revenue in 2015, 0.4 billion more than was generated from importing cars (with most of Slovenia's imported cars coming from Korea, Germany and France).

THE NUMBER OF CARS IN SLOVENIA IS INCREASING SLOWLY BUT SURELY

The prices of cars fell by 30% on average in the period from 2008 to 2015, which is perhaps one of the reasons behind the subsequent rise in car sales.

In 2015, there were a total of 1,078,737 cars registered in Slovenia, or 523 cars per 1,000 inhabitants.

According to the motorisation rate, Slovenia ranked ninth among EU Member States.

There were more male car owners in 2015 than female car owners, and they were on average slightly older. The Renault car brand was most popular among both groups, followed by Volkswagen and Opel. Most passenger cars in Slovenia were a metallic, light-grey colour.

TRAFFIC REGULATIONS

To drive on Slovenian motorways you must have a toll sticker, known as a vignette, and you must also use dipped headlights, even during the day. The use of fog lights is permitted only when visibility is reduced to less than 50 metres. The driver and passengers must all wear safety belts. Every car also has to have the required equipment, which includes a warning triangle, set of replacement bulbs, first aid kit and a reflective jacket. From 15 November to 15 March, cars must have winter equipment – winter tyres with a profile of at least 3mm or summer tyres and snow chains in the boot. The maximum drink driving limit for a breathalyser test is 0.5mg/l.

The following speed limits apply in Slovenia:

- 50 km/h (built-up areas)**
- 90 km/h (regional roads)**
- 110 km/h (express roads)**
- 130 km/h (motorways)**

**Male and female car owners by age, selected models and colours of their cars
Slovenia, 2015**



DRIVER'S LICENCE
Owners of registered cars: 61%
Average age: 50 years



DRIVER'S LICENCE
Owners of registered cars: 39%
Average age: 48 years



Most common brand: Renault
Most common colour: light grey metallic



Most common brand: Renault
Most common colour: light grey metallic

Source: SURS

It is possible to hire a car from specialist agencies or at airports. To hire a car, you must be 21 or over and have had a driving licence for at least two years.

The Automobile Association of Slovenia (AMZS) provides 24-hour assistance and towing.

PASSING YOUR DRIVING TEST

To take a driving test in the country your ordinary residence must be in Slovenia, or you have to submit proof that you have been studying in Slovenia for at least six months.

If you have a valid driving licence that was issued in another EU Member State, Lichtenstein, Norway or Iceland and you are temporarily or permanently living in the Republic of Slovenia, you can request a Slovenian driving licence on this basis. This can be done at any administrative unit.

If you have been registered to reside (temporarily or permanently) in Slovenia based on a residence permit for more than six months and your driving licence was not issued by an EU Member State, Lichtenstein, Norway or Iceland, you can get a Slovenian driving licence by undergoing a medical exam then taking driving lessons and the practical part of the driving test at a driving school.

The Slovenian Traffic Safety Agency provides testing for driving licences at more than 20 locations throughout Slovenia. Driving test candidates apply for a driving test at an administrative unit, where their fulfilment of the requirements is checked and they are registered for the theoretical and practical parts of the test.

In 2019, 53,450 candidates took the theory test and 47.15% achieved a passing grade, while 45,589 candidates took the practical test and 55.79% successfully passed.

Take a tour of Slovenia by car. In the morning, you can travel to the Alps and ascend to the very top of a mountain and then make your way towards the beautiful Slovenian coast and take a swim in the sea in the afternoon. All in the same day!



To use a camper van to travel around Slovenia you need to have the right category of driving licence.
Photo: Vid Ponikvar/www.slovenia.info



Farm fun and education.
Photo: Mitja Sodja/www.slovenia.info

TOURISM

AGRITOURISM

AN ORIGINAL WAY OF EXPERIENCING THE COUNTRYSIDE

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

BEING CLOSE TO NATURE IS IMPORTANT TO SLOVENIANS. SO IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT AGRITOURISM REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT SHARE OF TOURISM IN SLOVENIA, ATTRACTING BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN VISITORS. FARM STAYS OFFER VISITORS A HOLISTIC EXPERIENCE OF NATURE, TRADITIONS AND GASTRONOMY.

Slovenian tourist farms include organic farms, farms promoting healthy lifestyles, family-friendly farms, farms welcoming children visiting without their parents, cyclist-friendly farms, wine-producing farms, farms adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, farms specialising in horses and horse riding, and farms with petting zoos.

FAR FROM THE CROWDS

A farm holiday is all about being close to nature and people, especially their culture, wisdom and customs. Customs are, of course, typical of individual geographic areas. Housewives will teach you how to bake bread in a wood-fired oven, or you can have a go at picking hops, olives, cherries and grapes.

City children will enjoy the opportunity to spend time with farm animals and learn how to take care of them.

Tourist farms are becoming increasingly popular venues for family celebrations, and picnics, while a wedding in a traditional hayrack with popular folk or modern music is nothing unusual these days.

THE TASTES OF ORGANIC FOOD AMIDST A COSY FARM ENVIRONMENT

Home-grown vegetables are greener, fruits sweeter, homemade meat products fuller in taste, and it is impossible to resist a glass of homemade wine or beer.

For many visitors, the delicious smell of baking bread brings back childhood memories of time spent with their grandmother.

For children, however, it piques their curiosity about the everyday lives of their ancestors. Farm holidays can

also play an important part in a child's upbringing – fostering their love of nature, nation and the homeland.

THE BEST TOURIST FARMS

The best tourist farms in 2019 were judged to be Arkade in the Vipava Valley, Klinec in the village of Plešivo, Ošterija Klinec in Medana, Domačija Novak near Žužemberk, Posestvo Trnulja in the Ljubljansko barje marshes, Penzion Sinji vrh above the Vipava valley, Štern on the Pohorje, Šeruga in Dolenjska vas, Robidišče Organic Farm in Robidišče, and Abram on Nanos.

And according to the British newspaper The Guardian, the organic farm Pri Plajerju in the Trenta Valley is the best in Europe.

A personal touch, interesting dishes, food produced on the farm, and activities in nature for all generations, all enjoyed in the peace and quiet of the great outdoors: such are the characteristics of the best tourist farms.

Note, however, that we put only some of the bigger names in Slovenian agritourism on this list, and there are many more to discover that cater to all tastes. Even if you usually prefer the more glamorous tourist centres and hotels, take a look at what's on offer and you may be tempted to try something different, and explore the traditional world of Slovenian tourist farms.



Housewives on farms use only fresh, healthy ingredients to prepare tasty traditional Slovenian meals.
Photo: Ciril Jazbec/www.slovenia.info



TOURISM

440 YEARS OF THE LIPICA STUD FARM

A STORY OF BEAUTY, PRIDE, COURAGE, FRIENDSHIP AND INTEGRATION

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO: LIPICA STUD FARM ARCHIVES

19 MAY 2020 MARKED 440 YEARS SINCE THE START OF THE FASCINATING STORY OF THE LIPICA STUD FARM AND ITS LIPIZZAN HORSES.

The day that Charles II, Archduke of Austria, son of Ferdinand I, Holy Roman Emperor, bought the Lipica estate from the bishop of Trieste in 1580 is considered the day when the Lipica Stud Farm was established and the breeding of Lipizzan horses began. This day is thus celebrated every year as Lipizzan Day by the Slovenian Lipizzaner Breeding Association.

This is a story of beauty, pride, courage, friendship and integration, say those who proudly care for the white Lipizzaners and their foals, visitors to Lipica and its supporters.

The Lipica Stud Farm in this way enhances its role as the place of origin of all Lipizzaners around the world, and also its role as one of the most high-profile tourist destinations in Slovenia, and thus as one of the country's ambassadors to the world.

The Lipica estate, with more than 300 horses and over 300 hectares of green space, is again open to visitors and proudly showcases its story. This time next year, the Lipica Stud Farm will welcome its visitors with a new generation of foals, the renovated Maestoso Hotel and a fresh, modern and attractive offer.

THE LIPIZZAN HORSE BREEDING TRADITIONS IS NOMINATED FOR INSCRIPTION ON UNESCO'S REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

On behalf of eight participating countries, Slovenia submitted to the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris a multinational nomination of the Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in March 2020. Since the establishment of the stud farm, the breeding of Lipiz-

zan horses has expanded to the geographical areas of present-day Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

For over 450 years and under various political systems, the traditions have involved breeders, experts and communities from eight European countries.

These were the first custodians of the Lipizzan horse breeding tradition, which is based on mutual trust between horses and people, and a shared cultural heritage.

Lipizzaners are distinguished by longevity, excellent stamina, solid and strong character, and their learning and athletic capabilities. Years or even decades of training and knowledge transfer is necessary to obtain the expertise and skills of a Lipizzan horse breeder. This renowned breed of horses still plays an indispensable part in customs, celebrations and equestrian sports, and holds a special place in the everyday cultural and social life of rural communities, state stud farms and private breeders.

THE SYMBOLIC ROLE OF LIPIZZAN HORSES OVER CENTURIES

Lipizzaners are an integral part of local celebrations and festivities, such as traditional weddings, carnival processions, autumn parades, folklore events, horse shows, traditional driving of horses from the Alpine pastures in early autumn, and the blessing of horses on different occasions. Their image is iconic, being depicted on various items and artefacts, such as coins, banknotes, coats-of-arms, labels and postage stamps, and they play an important role at formal and protocol events. Their symbolic significance is passed on through oral tradition and folk songs testifying to the close emotional bond between man and horse. They also have a pivotal role in the life of the broader community, as seen in hippotherapy, sports (riding, carriage driving) and performances inspired by the principles of classical horsemanship of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.

Lipica is one of the most high-profile tourist destinations in Slovenia.



The joint nomination of eight European countries demonstrates an appreciation of a shared heritage that unites communities and states at local, national and international levels.

It highlights that UNESCO's 2003 Convention encourages the joint safeguarding of intangible heritage elements across languages and state borders, and thus promotes dialogue and understanding. An inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity will strengthen the cooperation and integration of all stakeholders involved in the safeguarding of this heritage element.

START OF THE RENOVATION OF THE MAESTOSO HOTEL IN LIPICA

The four-star superior hotel with 139 rooms, five con-

gress halls, indoor and outdoor swimming pools and an ingeniously designed wellness centre will receive its first guests at the beginning of 2021. With its bold image, the new Maestoso Hotel incorporates the characteristics of the Karst, the Lipica tradition and contemporary global trends. Its unique interior design will contribute to the guests' relaxed getaway while staying in touch with nature, and will simultaneously introduce them to the world of horses and equestrianism and encourage them to experience the Karst.

Matej Oset, Managing Director of Holding Kobilarna Lipica, d.o.o.: "The renovation of the Maestoso Hotel is one of the main priorities of the Lipica Stud Farm in 2020, when the farm celebrates its 440th anniversary. We are certain that green destinations will receive great attention in the future with their emphasis on active and healthy leisure in nature, and all of the above speaks in favour of the Lipica Stud Farm. Lipica complies with the definition of sustainable or green tourism that also embodies responsibility, while the renovation of the Maestoso Hotel completes its offer and enhances its role as the generator of tourism in the region. The goal of Kobilarna Lipica, d.o.o., is to complete the renovation by the end of the year. The stud farm will thus start the next year's tourist season on a high note. And what's more, the tourist season will now last all year round in Lipica."

The renovation and extension of the Maestoso Hotel will be executed by VG5 gradnja, inženiring in svetovanje, d.o.o., which submitted the most favourable bid in the public procurement procedure. The value of the renovation and extension works on the hotel amounts to EUR 6,877,800.



The new hotel incorporates the characteristics of Karst, the Lipica tradition and contemporary global trends.



The opening ceremony of the first art exhibition in Novo mesto, 1920 (photo: Gvido Dolenc). The photograph is archived at the Miran Jarc Library in Novo mesto.

ART

100 YEARS OF THE NOVO MESTO SPRING

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE SLOVENIAN AVANT-GARDE

DANILA GOLOB

IN 1920, A GROUP OF YOUNG ARTISTS FROM NOVO MESTO HELD AN ART EVENT THAT SHOOK THE LOCAL AND SLOVENIAN CULTURAL SPACE. WITH THEIR TALENT, THE ARTISTS WENT BEYOND THE FRAMEWORK OF THE THEN REGIONAL ART AND OUTLINED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE SLOVENIAN AVANT-GARDE.

The cultural and artistic events in Novo mesto were in a way an echo of the wider artistic avant-garde, which for the most part began its artistic revolution in various European cultural centres before the First World War. This movement, which is inscribed in Slovenia's cultural history as the Novo mesto Spring, took place soon after the war and expressed the hope that the cruelties of the conflict would never happen again.

A SPRING AWAKENING IN AUTUMN

The Novo mesto Spring actually took place in the autumn of 1920. It was the first provincial art exhibition, which was open from 26 September to 11 October 1920 in the Windischer Salon in Kandija, Novo mesto, under the auspices of the painter Rihard Jakopič. The exhibition involved the participation of ten artists: Rihard Jakopič, Božidar Jakac, Marjan Mušič, France Zupan, Ivan Čargo, Jože Cvelbar, Zdenko Skalicky, Franjo Ančik, Boris Grad and Ferdo Avsec, showing 337 works of art. This was followed by a concert at Kamen Castle, where Marij Kogoj played music and Zdenka Zikova, a member of the Ljubljana Opera, sang a number of arias. A literary evening of the avant-garde poet Anton Podbevšek and the poet Miran Jarc took place in the town's Narodni dom, built in 1873, the first on Slovenian soil. This was followed by stormy discussions about art and its essence and significance for man and society, in the company of the critic Josip Vidmar and the painter Fran Tratnik.

The one-off event was followed by several local events,

and in November the exhibition was repeated in Ljubljana.

The literary historian and theorist Dr. Marijan Dovič says that artistic events represented something of a shock for a provincial city, such as Novo mesto was at the time. The repetition of the Novo mesto event in Ljubljana in November stirred up and polarised the Slovenian artistic public. It was a time when newspapers were not yet able to report on all events on a daily basis, but this one nonetheless resonated strongly among the public, with political effects.

Thus a century ago a group of artists did something unimaginable. "This was a generation that was truly committed to art and many of the individuals also became prominent artists on a Slovenian scale," says Dr. Dovič.

EVENTS IN CELEBRATION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE NOVO MESTO SPRING

The Municipality of Novo mesto has declared 2020 the thematic year of the centenary of the Novo mesto Spring, during which a number of events will be organised by various organisations and institutions. The Municipality has entrusted the Miran Jarc Library in Novo mesto with the organisation. The library director, Luka Blažič, says that the Novo mesto Spring is a source of local pride, and one could even say a source of justified local patriotism. "The Novo mesto Spring is regarded as part of the identity of not only the city of Novo mesto, but also of its people, since they came into contact with the participants in the related events on a daily basis,"





May the Novo mesto Spring be an inspiration to the city of Novo mesto.
Photo: Municipality of Novo mesto archives

adds the library director, who explains that numerous institutions in Novo mesto are named after these artists who set new standards in Slovenian art. The Novo mesto Spring is also a significant milestone and a source of inspiration for future generations.

The focal point of the thematic year will be the presentation of contemporary interpretations of avant-garde art, the foundations of which were laid by the participants in the Novo mesto Spring.

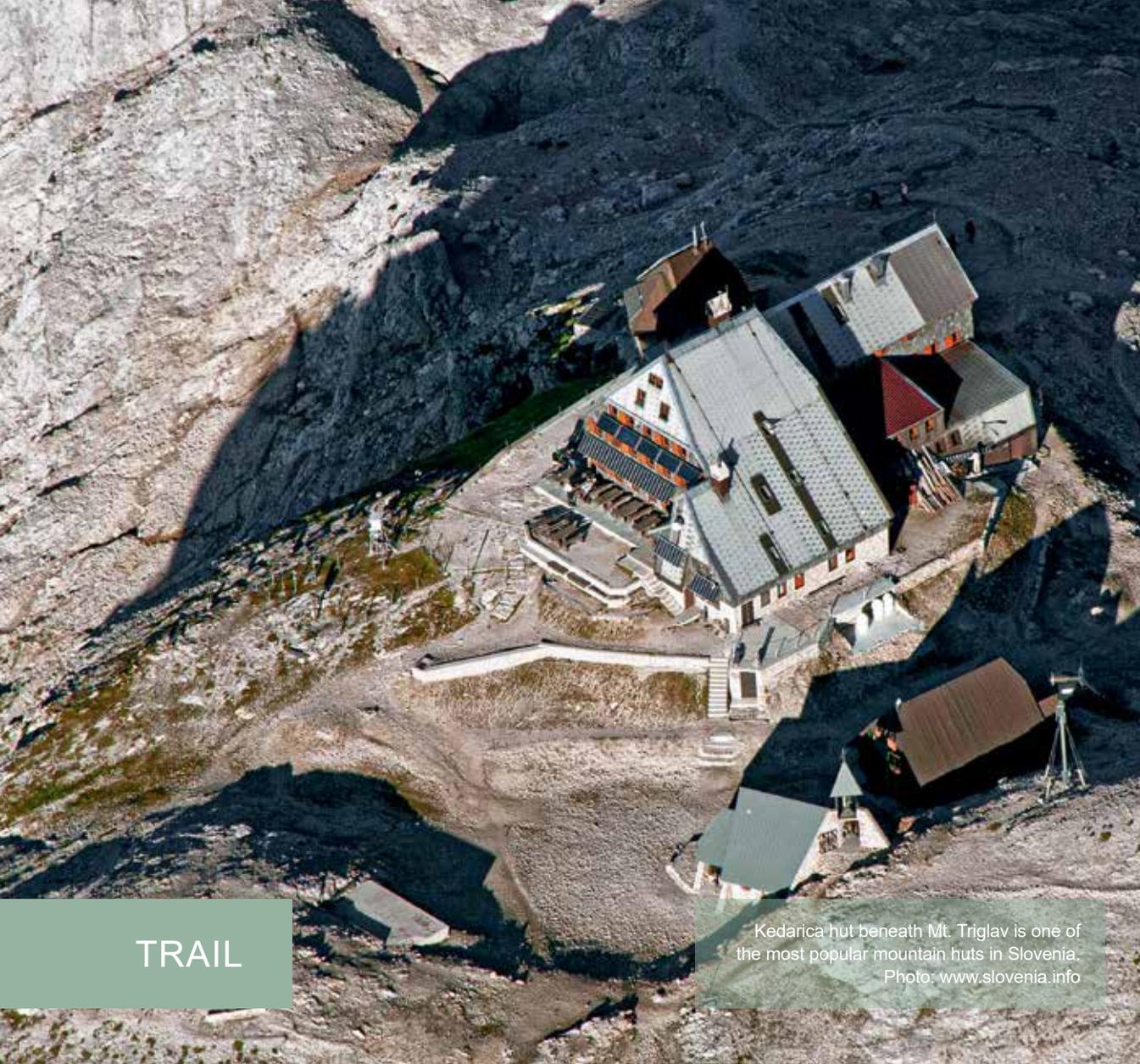
As written in the programme for the year, the Novo mesto Spring should primarily serve as “an inspiration based on the previous experience of the Spring Awakening, making Novo mesto the socioeconomic and cultural generator of the Slovenia of tomorrow”.

Major events:

26 September 2020 – The central event of the thematic year, which is to take place on the same date as a century ago, organised by the **Anton Podbevšek Theatre**.

26 September 2020 - 8 February 2021 The main exhibition **100 Years of the Novo mesto Spring in the Museum of Dolenjska** presents a combination of three different forms of art: the visual, literary and musical. It is an attempt at staging a retrospective on the first provincial exhibition in Novo mesto.

28 August–8 February 2021 The exhibition of the **Museum of Dolenjska entitled The Young, the Unknown, the Avant-garde** is conceived as an accompanying exhibition to 100 Years of the Novo mesto Spring, and describes the life, work, and personal traits of all the participants.



Kedarica hut beneath Mt. Triglav is one of the most popular mountain huts in Slovenia. Photo: www.slovenia.info

TRAIL

TIME TO VISIT THE SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINS

PLAN YOUR TRAIL AHEAD

POLONA PREŠEREN

SLOVENIA BOASTS A BEAUTIFUL ALPINE WORLD AND PRE-ALPINE MOUNTAIN RANGES THAT ATTRACT NUMEROUS FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC VISITORS WHO WISH TO EXPERIENCE A PRISTINE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT. AS MANY AS 1.7 MILLION VISITORS COME TO THE SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINS EVERY YEAR. OVER HALF OF THE LAST YEAR'S VISITORS WERE FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY.

Slovenians love to spend their free time hiking and being active in nature, and the country offers numerous and remarkably diverse mountain trails that connect valleys with mountains top and huts. Hikers can choose from 179 mountain huts, shelters or bivouacs, where they can spend a night or have a meal.

This year's hiking season is already in full swing. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, there are fewer foreign visitors, but the offer in mountain huts has been adapted to better suit the needs of Slovenian guests. Various packages are available, including visits to sights in the surrounding area, especially in huts on low mountains.

All mountain huts have their purpose and mission.

The honourable code of conduct of Slovenian hikers, available on the Alpine Association of Slovenia website, states that mountain huts (lodges, chalets, shelters and bivouacs) are intended for shelter, rest, food and mountain training.

Since different hikers have different wishes and needs, and since the facilities and offer available in huts vary, it is of course necessary to make some concessions to the local context.

When using the huts' facilities, it is important to use the least energy and water possible, to make as little noise as possible and to produce as little waste as possible. Ideally any waste should be brought back to the valley. Be considerate to the staff and other visitors and respect the house rules.

Huts welcome us in a homely atmosphere, they offer simple accommodation and services, provide information on trail conditions and weather forecasts, and send out alerts in the event of accidents.

Eating in mountain huts will reduce the weight of your backpack and, at the same time, will help support the huts and hiking associations that maintain them.

STAY SAFE IN THE MOUNTAINS

As in previous years, the Alpine Association of Slovenia stresses the appropriate safety precautions that you have to follow in the mountains. Hikers should observe the rules for safe mountaineering. They should bear in mind that this year's epidemic prevented the trail markers from doing their job and that therefore some trails might not be well marked. The Association stresses that it is important to be well prepared for hiking and to observe the rules of safe mountaineering in order to avoid accidents.

"Take care in choosing your trail and planning the timeline, in particular if you are accompanied by children or older hikers. Since conditions in the mountains can be unpredictable, it is not uncommon to encounter snowfields along some hiking trails even in summer, especially on shaded and northern slopes. You should not be misled by the temperatures in the valley and should always carry warm clothes in your backpack, including a hat and gloves. Storms and lightning are common during summer months. We cannot protect ourselves from being struck by lightning. It is important to set out to the mountains early in order to be safe in the valley or a mountain hut in the afternoon, when summer storms are the most frequent," warns the Alpine Association of Slovenia.

The Association, in participation with the Triglav Insurance Company, organises the Slovenia-wide campaign called Let's Clean Up Our Mountains.

This year's Slovenia-wide campaign is focused on better fire safety for mountain huts.

For the third consecutive year, the partners are organising a contest for the most beautiful trail according to hikers. This year they chose scenic path to Triglav across Luknja and Plemenice, once called the Bambergova path.

The Alpine Association of Slovenia and the Pivovarna Laško Union brewery work together in the project Let's Head for the Hills. Though a large part of this year's events were cancelled due to the epidemic, the brewery has come up with an idea of how to help the mountain huts: "With the Alpine Association of Slovenia we have developed a reusable 0.5-litre plastic cup that we will donate to 44 mountain huts. For each hut, the Pivovarna Laško Union brewery is offering 2,400 commemorative cups, free-of-charge and including delivery. The huts will make the commemorative cups available to their visitors and there will be a sign reading A Donation to Us. The cups bear the name of the respective hut and the profits from their sale will go to support their activities. The 105,600 cups will thus enable 105,600 euros of donations," explains Urban Kramberger, the

Laško brand manager at the Pivovarna Laško Union brewery. thletic capabilities.

The cups are made out of eco plastic, are very durable and thus contribute to a more sustainable environment.

As in previous years, the Siol.net webpage and Alpine Association of Slovenia have prepared a project called Best Mountain Hut. Enthusiastic hikers can vote for their favourite huts in the Slovenian hills and mountains. They can choose from 156 huts, 28 of which are in the high mountains and the rest in the low mountains or hills. The result will be announced at the end of the summer.



tičarjev dom at Vršič pass is a great starting point for mountaineering.
Photo: Tinkara Zupan/STA



Enjoy your lunch at the mountain hut - the food is simply delicious.
Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



The Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša with the Charles Michel, President of the European Council.
Photo: Thierry Monasse/STA

DIPLOMACY

SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU DRAWS NEAR FOR THE SECOND TIME IN 2021

NATAŠA BUŠLJETA, ANA KRAŠEVEC

EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES TAKE TURNS HOLDING THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU, ONE OF THE KEY EU INSTITUTIONS. THEY EACH UNDERTAKE THIS TASK FOR A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS IN A PRE-ESTABLISHED ORDER. SLOVENIA HELD THE COUNCIL PRESIDENCY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2008, AS THE FIRST AMONG THE COUNTRIES THAT JOINED THIS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN 2004.

It can be said confidently that Slovenia was among the brightest stars of the EU in that period. It was also the first new Member State to adopt the euro and join the Schengen Area. But let us return to the present.

In the second half of 2021, Slovenia will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the second time.

The Slovenian Government is, of course, well aware of the importance of this task, so preparations for the presidency are in full swing. Since Slovenia's first presidency, not only has the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, which slightly altered the role of the presiding country, but in the middle of Slovenia's most intense preparations for the presidency, living and working conditions were fundamentally changed by the novel coronavirus. When prioritizing measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus and mitigate the consequences of the epidemic on citizens and the economy, the Slovenian Government also harmonised the eighteen-month programme of the presidency trio, together with the German and Portuguese Government and the European Union External Action.

Germany, Portugal and Slovenia will hold the presidency one after the other and together constitute a trio. This type of cooperation ensures the continuity of the EU Council's work and informs other EU institutions of the Council's priorities.

In addition to the trio partner countries, all other EU Member States are also important. Prime Minister Janez Janša and Foreign Minister Anže Logar have held talks with many European and other leaders and actively participated in the dialogue on the challenges of the European Union, so that we have been able to set ambitious but realistic goals.

In the last phase, our trio's programme was adapted to the COVID-19 epidemic.

Thus, the key goal is to join efforts to ensure a fast economic and social recovery and consequently strengthen the resilience of Europe.

The green and digital transformation of the European Union will be given priority. We will strengthen the strategic autonomy of the European Union and its ability to deal with crises such as a pandemic or cyberattacks. The trio's common priorities also include addressing climate change.

One of the tasks has therefore been completed successfully. Now, Slovenia will focus on drawing up its own six-month programme and on other tasks that await it.

For Slovenia, the presidency is also an opportunity for the overall promotion of the country and its knowledge, economy and tourism.

Successful project implementation will undoubtedly increase the reputation of our country in the EU and beyond. The preparations for and the implementation of the presidency also constitute a great investment in terms of the improvement of the knowledge, skills and capacities of Slovenian public administration.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE POST-COVID–19 WORLD

NEIGHBOURS – REGIONS – GLOBAL WORLD: PARTNERS OR RIVALS?

MATEJ GREGOREC

THE 15TH BLED STRATEGIC FORUM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WILL TAKE PLACE ON MONDAY, 31 AUGUST 2020, IN BLED, SLOVENIA. THE ONE-DAY EVENT, WHICH WILL RUN UNDER THE TITLE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE POST-COVID–19 WORLD; NEIGHBOURS – REGIONS – GLOBAL WORLD: PARTNERS OR RIVALS?, WILL BE ORGANISED AS A HYBRID ONE, WITH A SEGMENT TAKING PLACE ON-SITE WHILE SOME DISCUSSIONS WILL BE HELD ONLINE. GENERAL AND SPECIFIC MEASURES, INCLUDING THOSE RELATED TO IN-DOOR GATHERINGS, WILL APPLY TO ALL PARTICIPANTS.

DIPLOMACY

This year's discussions will be centred on the COVID–19 pandemic, as it has affected societies and economies around the globe and permanently reshaped the world as we know it.

The speakers will contemplate whether a reinvention of our societies is inevitable in order to create a resilient and sustainable global community capable of responding to the challenges of the 21st century.

CHALLENGING PRESENT AND FUTURE

In these challenging times, with the global response inefficient and inadequate, we are seeing

a renewed shift in the international community towards enhanced neighbourly and regional cooperation and a need for new initiatives. The pandemic has clearly revealed the issues and problems that effective multilateralism is facing, and brought to the forefront different concepts of international cooperation. Good neighbourly relations and robust regional initiatives will play a significant role in redefining and reinventing the way the global community faces new and asymmetrical threats in the future.

Emerging regional groupings, such as the Three Seas Initiative, open up new opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe to bridge infrastructural gaps in the fields of energy, mobility, and digitalisation, undertake strategic investment projects, and strengthen transatlantic cooperation. In this context, artificial intelligence and digitalisation, in particular, have untapped potential to become game changers in helping us reinvent society in a sustainable manner.

The European Union finds itself in the midst of these changes, and our ability to understand, adapt to and mitigate them will determine our future political, security, and economic outreach. In this new reality, the EU needs to lead by example and promote as well as safeguard these values, which have enabled us to prosper and develop as a groundbreaking project, redefining relations among states, regions, and societies.



The Bled Strategic Forum is a leading international conference in Central and South-Eastern Europe, offering an opportunity to express and contrast opinions on modern society and its future. The purpose of the Forum is to gather participants from various fields with diverse knowledge, and encourage them to exchange views and seek innovative solutions to present and future challenges. In addition, the Forum is also a unique opportunity for meetings and networking with regional and global stakeholders.



Articles about Slovenia can also be found in the slovenia.si website's new section, Inside View. In addition to articles about nature, art, cultural heritage, business ideas and innovations, Inside View also contains news and political content. Slovenia.si also comes in Slovenian; some of the articles about Slovenia are the same and some are different from the English version. New stories are added every day.

Learn something new about Slovenia!