



Good Practice Story Title: From Waste to Wonder: How City promenade Brežice event Became a Model of Sustainability

Destination: Brežice

Country: Slovenia

Submitting Organization: ZPTM Brežice

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Rounded hills, a green world at the confluence of the Sava and Krka rivers, thermal springs, vineyards, and rich architectural heritage – these are Brežice. A place where different worlds meet, its natural and cultural heritage along with vibrant community life enhance the destination's development. With a love for nature, we have chosen a sustainable path in tourism and joined the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism, becoming one of the top five most sustainable destinations in Slovenia in 2022, with the title of Slovenia Green Destination Platinum. Brežice, small yet rich in diverse tourism offerings, provides thermal springs, castles, museums, and wine cellars in two wine-growing areas. Explore the repnice, unique quartz sand caves that were once used as storage for crops but now serve as wine cellars. Indulge in gourmet pleasures at a Michelin Plate restaurant or taste local food at tourist farms. A la carte options are available from providers included in the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism and those part of the collective brand Brežice Selected/Selection. The destination can be explored by bike or on foot. Various cycling and hiking trails of different difficulty levels allow you to discover Brežice in a sustainable way. Brežice boasts a strategic approach to sustainable tourism, emphasized in the Tourism Development Strategy of the Municipality of Brežice 2023-2030. The strategy's key direction is the integration of tourist offerings and sustainable practices, reflected



in numerous projects such as the establishment of the collective brand Brežice Selected, development of green mobility, and integration of local producers into the tourism offering. Sustainable tourism in Brežice is based on respecting natural and cultural resources. Connecting the city with surrounding attractions and thermal offerings is a key priority, which will improve accessibility and increase the attractiveness of the destination for both domestic and foreign visitors. An exceptional example of a sustainable approach in tourism is the organization of the Zero waste event, Brežice City Promenade.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

In an idyllic corner of Slovenia, where vineyards gently intertwine with warm springs and ancient castles, lies the sustainable destination of Brežice. A city imbued with history and natural beauty, it offers a diverse range of tourist attractions including thermal springs, majestic castles, rich museums, and wine cellars spanning two wine-growing regions.

Since 2014, Brežice has come alive in a new light in July, when the main city street is closed to traffic. This act revives the city center and creates a summer buzz that attracts both locals and tourists. During the summer evenings, the street comes alive with concerts, stalls featuring artisans, a rich selection of drinks and food, and lively animations and workshops for children. All these activities are free, offering visitors a unique festival under the stars.

However, with the increasing number of visitors came a shadow in the form of rising waste, particularly plastic cups and other trash. This was the impetus for us to sign a green pledge and commit to transitioning to sustainable events. Our goal was to obtain the Zero Waste event certification, which we successfully achieved. An even more important achievement was proving that large events can be organized in a sustainable way.

The City Promenade has become a model for other events and we have proven that with collective efforts and the right approach, we can achieve sustainable goals that benefit both the environment and the local community. With a sustainable approach to event organization, we have reduced waste and increased visitor awareness of the importance of environmental protection. Our efforts are in line with the Tourism Development Strategy of the Municipality of Brežice 2023-2030, which emphasizes the integration of tourist offerings and sustainable practices, the development of green mobility, and the integration of local producers into the tourism offering.

Our efforts also align with other Slovenian and European strategies and policies. The Slovenian Tourism Development Strategy 2022-2028 emphasizes sustainable development, digitalization, and improving competitiveness. At the same time, it focuses on increasing the added value of the tourism offer and strengthening connections at the local level. The European Union promotes green and sustainable practices under the European Green Deal, which aims for a transition to a circular economy, reducing the carbon footprint, and protecting natural resources.



Following the success of the City Promenade, we are increasingly contacted by associations and other event organizers who want to transfer our sustainable practices to their events. We have also been invited to participate in various events to share our experiences and knowledge about organizing sustainable events. In doing this, Brežice has solidified itself as one of the leading sustainable destinations in Slovenia and contributed to the spread of sustainable practices to other places. Brežice is not just a city, but a beacon of sustainability, where the heritage of the past intertwines with a commitment to the future.

Issues faced:

The Brežice City Promenade, which has been running since 2014, has become an extremely popular and well-attended event. Initially, it was a smaller gathering where local musicians performed due to the street being closed to traffic, but the event has evolved into the longest-running festival in the area. With the growth of the event, its program has expanded to include food, drinks, and activities for children. The increased number of visitors also led to an increase in waste. After the concerts, the venue was littered with plastic cups and other trash, causing dissatisfaction among local residents and negatively impacting the reputation of the organizers. Trash bins were overflowing and waste was not properly separated, highlighting the need for better waste management.

As a sustainable destination, we strive to reduce our carbon footprint, but most visitors arrive at the events by car, and performers and providers come from various places. As a platinum destination, we decided to organize events in a sustainable manner, which initially presented challenges with some providers, especially in the hospitality sector. They believed that a green event was difficult to implement and would not yield the desired results. The main problem was plastic cups, single-use packaging, and utensils, as providers prioritized profit over sustainable solutions.

Solution:

We found a solution by joining the Zero Waste Slovenia movement under the auspices of the Ecologists Without Borders association. In 2023, we decided to certify the City Promenade as a Zero Waste event. We adopted a corporate Zero Waste policy aimed at ensuring that no waste ends up in landfills, incineration, or the environment. According to the Zero Waste principles, we had to correctly separate at least 90% of all waste, meaning only a tenth could remain mixed. We committed to adhering to national, regional, and local waste and recycling legislation. We signed a written pledge to continuously reduce the amount of mixed waste and prevent the generation of new waste.

At the 2023 event, we focused on reducing waste and improving sorting, encouraging visitors to use public or group transportation, and working with environmentally conscious providers. These measures are intended to present the City Promenade and other events at the destination as examples of environmentally friendly events that respect the local community and demonstrate our care for nature.





Close collaboration with Brežice municipal services was crucial, advising on the number of necessary trash bins, placement of ecological islands, and their optimal locations. In the past, we hid trash bins because their sight "polluted" the venue, but now we have made them prominent and placed them in highly visible locations, marked with flags so that visitors know exactly where they can dispose of their waste.

Based on our policies, we established concrete measures to reduce waste at events, including the use of biodegradable materials and promoting reuse. We increased provider awareness of the importance of environmental protection through educational workshops and visitors through promotional campaigns. We also introduced a better waste separation system. We work closely with providers to ensure compliance with our sustainability goals. We also signed the Pledge to Eliminate Single-Use Plastic from Slovenian Tourism, prepared by the Slovenian Tourist Board, requiring the elimination of single-use plastic bottles, cups, and food packaging by the end of 2024.

Educating and raising awareness among hospitality providers were key to convincing them to start using environmentally friendly food and drink packaging. The green pledge gave us additional momentum and motivation to strive to organize and achieve our goals. Although we knew from the start that it would be a challenging task, we were confident that with good organization, perseverance, awareness, and collaboration, we could achieve the desired results.

Our greatest achievement was the introduction of returnable cups and the comprehensive approach of the destination, municipality, and municipal services to organizing the event. This approach significantly reduced the amount of waste and improved sorting, which positively impacted the environment and the satisfaction of the local community.

Our sustainable approach has already attracted the attention of other event organizers who seek our advice and experience. We are often invited to share our practices and knowledge about organizing sustainable events, thereby contributing to the spread of sustainable practices to other places. With the measures introduced and collaboration, we have transformed the City Promenade into an event that respects the environment and contributes to sustainable development.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

An important part of preparing for such an event were the educational initiatives that we organized in collaboration with the Ecologists Without Borders association. Initially, they provided training and guidelines to us, the organizers—the Brežice destination team and the public company Komunala Brežice. In the next step, we invited all providers who decided to participate in the event to the training.

Providers were selected through a public call that included a mandatory green clause, which set the rules for participation in the event. These rules prohibited the use of single-use plastic packaging and



specified a list of materials that providers at the event were to use, so we knew what kind of waste to expect. We mandated the use of returnable cups, provided trash bags to each provider for each evening, explained where each type of waste should go, and emptied and monitored the bins during the event. This constant monitoring reminded providers of their responsibilities and showed that we were serious about our commitments.

In selecting providers for stalls and catering services, we encouraged cooperation among them. For example, if one provider ran out of cups, they could borrow some from another. We also banned the sale of balloons by providers, as this would create unnecessary waste.

Before the event, we informed the public about our goal to obtain the Zero Waste event certification through social media, regional media, and a press conference. We provided visitors with tips on how to attend the event in a sustainable manner to reduce their carbon footprint. At the event itself, we set up ecological islands where a group of young volunteers and students ensured proper waste separation. We called them the Green Guard, and they were dressed in distinctive shirts to be highly visible at the event. The volunteers were trained before the event along with employees of the public municipal company to precisely define where each type of waste belongs.

The Green Guard helped and educated visitors on proper waste separation. In addition, we raised awareness with fun signs on tables that showed where each type of waste belongs. We marked the ecological islands with flags and placed them in visible locations because we believe that visitors are more likely to properly dispose of waste if the bins are accessible and visible.

To green the event, we placed flowers in trash bins that are part of the permanent city setup to prevent them from being filled with mixed waste. We also placed signs and directional markers on the bins indicating the location of the nearest ecological island.

To prevent the throwing of cigarette butts on the ground, we placed ashtrays on every table and installed portable ashtrays on streetlight poles designed as voting boxes. We made them in collaboration with the social enterprise Knof from the neighboring town, which made them from reused materials.

We also educated visitors about the clean drinking water available in our destination. We set up a water dispenser where everyone could freely refill their bottles, thereby reducing the amount of plastic bottles and promoting drinking tap water. In agreement with catering providers, they did not offer water in plastic bottles, and backstage, we provided performers with tap water in pitchers. All event staff used their own bottles and refilled water from the dispenser.

Every evening, we organizers collected all waste in one place and weighed it by fractions (paper, glass, plastic, biological, and mixed waste), which was essential to enable accurate measurement of results at the end of each day.





Achievements and Results:

With our efforts, the event "City Promenade" has earned the Zero Waste Event certification, becoming the longest event in Slovenia to hold such a certification. We achieved an exceptional result—98% of waste was properly sorted. Our efforts were recognized at the national level and featured in national media. However, we were more delighted by the fact that the venue was clean and litter-free the same evening after the event concluded, which is a significant improvement over previous years.

The adopted strategy for sustainable event management significantly improved waste management and awareness among all participants. We used a methodology based on the best practices and Zero Waste standards, which enabled us to exceed expectations. Our measures proved to be effective and sustainable, increasing the satisfaction of the local community and all involved parties.

We convinced skeptics from the hospitality sector, who initially mocked our efforts and doubted the final success. In the end, they congratulated us on our consistency and deserved success, marking a significant personal achievement. We also impressed visitors who initially doubted our efforts. Despite receiving negative comments on social media, we always responded positively, spreading positive communication. When they saw comparative photos of the venue from previous years and last year's events, we received numerous praises.

Our efforts paid off, and we proved that it is possible to organize large events in a sustainable manner. City Promenade has become a role model for other events, as we have shown that through collective efforts and the right approach, we can achieve sustainable goals that benefit both the environment and the local community.

With this successful implementation, we have contributed to the spread of sustainable practices that align with national and European environmental policy, demonstrating that even large events can contribute to a better future.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

We have proven that where there is a will, there is a way. Despite the prolonged 14-day event, we managed to achieve enviable results. The key to success was thorough organization and effective collaboration of all stakeholders. It is important to highlight the comprehensive training of the Green Guard, who also acted swiftly when faced with waste not part of the event but brought from elsewhere (from home, from city restaurants). The Green Guard identified the waste and directed visitors to dispose of it in the correct bin. We learned that the friendliness and goodwill of the Green Guard are crucial to persuading people. With a positive attitude, we transformed negative opinions into positive ones. A visitor who grumbled about sorting on the first day proudly sorted his own waste and educated new visitors a few days later.



Children proved to be the most consistent in sorting waste, indicating that a lot of education on this topic is done in our educational institutions. We educated them through workshops that used no single-use materials or generated new waste.

At the Green Guard, we found that not everyone is suitable for the job. One volunteer was not consistent in her duties, so we asked her to leave. This showed other volunteers that their work is important and must be well and consistently performed. If any visitor left trash on the table, we quickly cleaned it up, as this could have triggered a domino effect with most leaving waste on tables. We "closed" the regular city trash bins with decorative flowers that added greening and decoration to the event and prevented disposal of waste in mixed waste bins. We placed an ashtray on each table to prevent cigarette butts from being thrown on the ground. We also prepared a "fun" sorting ashtray where visitors voted by depositing cigarette butts in the part of the ashtray that represented their answer to the question of the day. Visitors really liked this approach and were interested in the results.

A green clause in the public invitation was an excellent step, as we restricted providers from the start regarding potential waste. One requirement was the mandatory use of returnable glasses. On the first day, a provider arrived without such glasses. We conditioned him to borrow some from another provider, or he could not participate in the event. This showed that they must respect the event's rules. Mistakes in sorting by providers were regularly and promptly pointed out, and we discussed any issues with them.

We also educated visitors about the behind-the-scenes organization of the event. We weighed the collected waste daily, posted results and before/after photos. We always responded positively to negative comments and included our arguments.

In the future, we plan to further educate visitors during the event, publicly announce the previous day's weighing results on stage, and inform them that we are a Zero Waste event. Additionally, we will ensure that visitors know where the ecological stations are located and who the Green Guard is and its purpose. We would also like more cooperation with the municipal company. We believe that for the needs of all events at the location, we could purchase eco returnable glasses that event organizers could borrow. This way, we found that the amount of waste is significantly reduced.

In the midst of the lively celebrations of the City Promenade, we discovered that dedication and collaboration can turn challenges into victories. With our collective efforts, we created a cleaner, greener event that not only met but exceeded our sustainability goals. The sight of proud visitors and pristine streets painted a picture of a future where sustainability and joy go hand in hand.



Recognitions and Additional References

Our efforts have been recognized in various media outlets:

<https://www.caszazemljo.si/trajnostno/zelene-brezice.html>

<https://www.slovenia.info/sl/novinarsko-sredisce/novice/25763-mestna-promenada-brezice-ponosna-prejemnica-naziva-zero-waste-prireditve>

<https://www.eposavje.com/zabava/uspesno-zakljucena-mestna-promenada-2023>

<https://demokracija.si/nasi-kraji/foto-obcina-brezice-zanimiva-zelena-in-trajnostna-destinacija-za-izlete-in-pocitnice/>

<https://radio.brezice.eu/ob-svetovnem-dnevu-turizma-v-brezicah-za-utrjevanje-trajnostnih-resitev/>

<https://www.zelenaslovenija.si/esg/mestna-promenada-brezice-ponosna-prejemnica-naziva-zero-waste-prireditve-esg-184-185/>

<https://dnevne-novice.com/posvet-o-javnih-prireditvah-in-tudi-o-gostinstvu-z-manj-odpadki/>

<https://www.ekodezela.si/eko-okolje/prireditve-z-manj-odpadki-v-sloveniji-dobre-prakse-in-izzivi/>

<https://www.posavskiobzornik.si/gospodarstvo/ob-svetovnem-dnevu-turizma-v-zptm-brezice-utrjuje-o-trajnostne-resitve-101471>

We shared our experiences and advice with other destinations and their event organizers at the national level. We participated in a roundtable in Maribor: Conference on Public Events and Hospitality with Less Waste.



Visitor comments on social media:





Before and after using returnable glasses



NEXT MORNING DAY



THE END OF THE EVENING

