



Good Practice Story Title: LUV fest

Destination: Ljubljana

Country: Slovenia

Submitting Organization: Ljubljana Tourism

Category:

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

Destination description:

Ljubljana Tourism is a destination management organisation established by the City of Ljubljana. Ljubljana Tourism fosters the development and undertakes the promotion of tourism in Ljubljana and the Ljubljana region in conjunction with tourism providers. We enthusiastically promote the city and its stunning surroundings, providing reliable and comprehensive information about the area. We take guests on guided tours and exciting adventures, opening the doors to a world of charming experiences. Through active participation in tourism business events, we proudly showcase Ljubljana and the Central Slovenia region, along with its unforgettable experiences. Our dependable online hub at visitljubljana.com opens the doors to infinite inspiration and a treasure trove of knowledge, which we warmly share at the tourist information centre in the city centre, informing visitors about the exceptional offerings they can experience in Ljubljana.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

LUV Fest embodies Tourism Ljubljana’s strategic efforts to promote four-season tourism in Ljubljana. Just like the now well-established November Gourmet Ljubljana culinary festival has spiced up the autumn, this latest festival will add interest to the traditionally quiet months in town, when fewer tourists are usually seen.

The aim of the festival is thus to position Ljubljana as a destination that should also be visited in February and March, and to create a livelier mood in the city for its residents, too. Throughout this period, both locals and visitors can enjoy the city’s special decorations, experience unique stories about Ljubljana in guided tours, create unforgettable memories by taking pictures at selected locations, enjoy the concerts, exhibitions and other cultural events. All of these activities share the theme of love and romance.



LUV Fest plays an important connecting role by bringing together many of Ljubljana’s cultural institutions, artists, hospitality businesses and other service providers that participate in the festival programme. The charming old town, picturesque River Ljubljanica embankments and the medieval castle watching over the city, and a view of the Alpine peaks... to many visitors, Ljubljana seems like a setting for a romantic film. As it draws inspiration from the romantic image of the Slovenian capital, LUV Fest will link love, art and rambling.

Issues faced:

In 2020, Ljubljana Tourism adopted the Development Strategy for the Tourist Destination of Ljubljana and the Ljubljana Region 2021–2027, which identifies maintaining competitiveness as a key measure that will significantly impact the tourism sector, including the new Ljubljana Love Festival. The Ljubljana Love Festival was initiated as part of Ljubljana Tourism's strategic efforts to promote four-season tourism in the city. Traditionally, Ljubljana experiences fluctuations in tourist activity throughout the year, with a significant drop in visitors during the winter months, particularly in February and March. Recognizing this seasonal challenge, Ljubljana Tourism identified the need to develop new events and festivals during these low season periods to maintain the city's appeal as a tourist destination year-round.

Solution:

LUV fest addressed this issue by leveraging the romantic charm and cultural richness of Ljubljana to attract visitors during the quieter winter months. By creating an engaging and diverse program centred around the theme of love and romance, the festival aims to position Ljubljana as a destination worth visiting in February and March, thus extending the tourism season and boosting visitor numbers during traditionally slower periods. Additionally, the festival aligns with Ljubljana Tourism's broader objectives of promoting the city's cultural heritage, fostering community engagement, and enhancing the overall visitor experience. By celebrating love in all its forms and bringing together cultural institutions, artists, hospitality businesses, and service providers, the festival serves as a platform for showcasing the city's vibrant cultural scene and strengthening its reputation as a welcoming and inclusive destination.

Overall, the Ljubljana Love Festival was conceived as a strategic initiative to address seasonality challenges, promote year-round tourism, and showcase the unique charm and cultural richness of Ljubljana to visitors from around the world.

Main goals:

- Connecting cultural institutions, producers, the creative sector, as well as restaurants under a common theme.
- Increasing tourist demand in February and March, traditionally low season months.
- Extending the average length of stay and average spending, as well as increasing the number of overnight stays outside the main season.
- Elevating Ljubljana's recognition as a creative city for city breaks.
- Enhancing the international visibility of Ljubljana as a city of art and culture.



Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

In the Development Strategy for the Tourist Destination of Ljubljana, one of the unique selling points (USPs) identified for Ljubljana is its romantic backdrop, coupled with a sense of well-being and the advantage of a city center with pedestrian-friendly areas. Therefore, the Ljubljana Love Festival could become a key element in positioning Ljubljana as a destination that must be visited in February. The answer lies in love. However, this love is not just a typical romantic love but something much more profound. It exists beyond its romantic idealization. It's a love for our city, for culture and art. It is the affection we feel for our parents, children, and family. It is caring for friends. It is being in tune with oneself. It is the joy of creative work. It is being in awe of nature. It is becoming one with the transcendental and divine. It is the cheer of good food and wine. It is falling in love with the place where you live. It is a commitment to art. It is a passion for travel and new experiences. The concept of the festival is very broad, as is the content of all events within the festival. The goal of the festival is to bring together various event producers and stakeholders in the fields of culture, art, creativity, and gastronomy within the same timeframe, with a clear communication plan for maximum international media coverage and recognition of Ljubljana.

The project for the new festival began to take shape in the spring of 2022. We defined the conceptual framework and main elements it should encompass. Additionally, we conducted an analysis and review of the key offerings and events for February and March in Ljubljana, identified key festival partners and events to include, as well as the festival's target audience. By the end of the year, we professionally developed the festival concept, created a comprehensive graphic identity, and began preparing for the first edition of the festival. The inaugural festival was successfully held from February 8th to March 12th, 2023. In 2024, we successfully enhanced the content of LUV Fest.

The festival offers a diverse range of activities, including concerts, theatrical performances, operas, ballets, dances, and films. It also features performances, literary gatherings, immersive tours, creative workshops, outdoor art installations, unique city decorations, and special offerings in hotels, restaurants, and shops. A standout feature of the LUV festival is its outdoor art gallery, showcasing exhibits like "Cosmic Attraction" by Janez Grošelj in Zvezda Park, and "Exploring the Hidden Corners of Ljubljana" by Matej Bizovičar in less crowded locations in the old town. Adding to the artistic ambiance are charming birdhouses and handmade heart-shaped ornaments with bird motifs along Wolfova Street and Pod Trančo, reminding passersby that love is in the air.

Main parts of the festival: art installations across Ljubljana, outside theatre Ana Srčna, Gregorjevo festival, creative workshops in local craftsmen studios, cultural experiences like concerts, exhibitions, and other events, culinary offerings.

Achievements and Results:

We have achieved one of the strategic goals outlined in the Strategic Guidelines for Cultural Tourism and Events in Ljubljana for the period 2022–2027 - the development of an event platform at the city level to connect numerous existing fragmented events and content into a temporally and spatially cohesive story. After last year's inaugural edition of the festival, we asked the city's residents for feedback on the festival. It turned out that the surveyed residents are very supportive of events in February.





Some facts from the research:

84.7% of residents agree that Ljubljana needs events in February.

94.1% of respondents like or partially like the festival's concept.

76.6% of respondents liked the Gregorjevo holiday even the most.

92.7% of respondents like or partially like the festival's graphic identity.

Culture is the second most important motivator for foreign visitors coming to Ljubljana.

65.6% of respondents were encouraged to attend festival events by information on the visitljubljana website.

On average, 70.3% of respondents associated the event they attended with the festival.

In the future, respondents would most like to see music events, social events, events for seniors, street events, and cinema screenings. Respondents would like to see more decorations throughout Ljubljana and more events in other city quarters. They appreciate the emphasis on the diversity of love for fellow human beings. Some feel that the content of the festival was already rich enough in its first edition. Others would like to see more events in the field of literature, more events for different age groups, and for the LGBTQ+ population, while some are already looking forward to next year's edition:

We have incorporated most of the suggestions from the respondents into this year's program. For example, we included more literary events, various workshops, outdoor art installations, and content for the LGBTQI+ community. We hope that residents will embrace the festival, contribute to its creation, and continue to live with it in the future.

Compared to the first edition, where 35 partners participated in co-creating the festival, this year, over 75 partners from various fields joined the festival, helping us create a rich program with more than 130 events. We enhanced the city centre decoration with an additional art installation. The budget remained the same as last year.

We also extended the tourism season: we observe an increase in arrivals and overnight stays in February and March. Between 2023 and 2022, we see a 42% increase in arrivals and a 36% increase in overnight stays during February and March. This is a higher percentage compared to the annual growth rate. In 2023, we achieved a total of 21% more arrivals and 16% more overnight stays annually compared to 2022. It is also important to highlight the distribution of arrivals and overnight stays by month. In 2022, arrivals in February and March accounted for 7.54% of all arrivals and 7.8% of all overnight stays. In 2023, this percentage increased to 8.87% of all arrivals and 9.14% of all overnight stays. For 2024, we have official data up to May 2024. In the first five months, a total of 389,854 arrivals and 801,753 overnight stays were recorded. This represents a 16% increase in arrivals and a 14% increase in overnight stays in the first five months. In February and March, we observe a 27% increase in arrivals and a 21% increase in overnight stays compared to 2023. The data indicate that the activities of Tourism Ljubljana and its partners have positively influenced the increased popularity of the destination in February and March. With activities such as LUV Fest, we are achieving the desesonalization of the tourism offer and demand.

Results are also important from the sustainability point of view. Regarding social sustainability, the festival fosters a sense of community by involving residents, artists, and businesses, promoting social cohesion and pride in the city's cultural offerings. By catering to diverse age groups and communities, including the LGBTQ+ population, the festival ensures broad social inclusion and participation. The festival also promotes and preserves local culture and





traditions through various events and activities, strengthening the community's cultural identity. A significant part of the LUV Fest story is our support for local artists and NGOs at the beginning of their careers. These artists are given the opportunity to showcase their talent through installations created specifically for LUV Fest. This not only provides them with substantial references for their future endeavors but also enriches the cultural landscape of Ljubljana. For instance, artists who have participated in the festival have gone on to perform at other prestigious events, such as the Brixen Light Festival, iLight Singapore, and Respect: Culture & Nature in Bad Radkersburg. This support for emerging artists aligns with our commitment to fostering local talent and promoting sustainable cultural development. Regarding environmental sustainability, we support eco-friendly practices. All efforts are made to minimize the environmental impact of the festival through sustainable event management practices, such as reducing waste and promoting recycling. The festival also encourages walking tours and activities in pedestrian-friendly areas, reducing the carbon footprint associated with transportation. Through art installations and workshops, the festival raises awareness about environmental issues and promotes sustainable living practices among attendees.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

Implementing the good practices observed during the LUV festival likely came with its own set of challenges, as with any large-scale event. Here are some challenges that have been faced:

1. Partner coordination: with an increased number of partners, coordinating schedules, responsibilities, and expectations could have been challenging. To overcome this, we used clear communication channels and had regular meetings.
2. Budget Allocation: despite maintaining a consistent budget, allocating resources effectively and ensuring financial sustainability have been challenging. Implementing strict budget monitoring procedures, conducting regular financial audits, and exploring alternative funding sources have helped overcome these challenges.

Overall, proactive planning, effective communication, and adaptability are key to overcoming challenges encountered during the implementation of good practices in event management like the LUV festival. Regular evaluation and continuous improvement are essential for ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of such initiatives.

The support and collaboration of partners were crucial for the success of this year's event, which exceeded our expectations. A significantly larger number of partners participated compared to last year, adding exceptional diversity and richness to the festival. The program was richer than the first edition, with upgraded art installations and city decorations. Through collaboration with co-creators, we provided visitors with an even greater experience of the festival atmosphere and connection with the surroundings.

Recognitions and Additional References

LUV Fest has garnered widespread recognition for its innovative approach to enhancing tourism and cultural vibrancy in Ljubljana. Since its inception, the festival has received acclaim from both locals and international visitors for its unique blend of art, culture, and culinary experiences. Additionally, LUV Fest has been featured in numerous media outlets, garnering positive reviews and increasing awareness of Ljubljana as a year-round tourist



destination. We particularly pride ourselves on the number of unpaid media mentions. According to the summary of media coverage for January, February, and March 2024, there were 28 features related to the LUV festival, including 11 in print media, 3 on television, 2 on the radio, and 12 online. There were more features compared to last year (2023: 25), especially in print media (2024: 11, 2023: 4). Online: According to the statistics on the visitation of landing pages related to the LUV festival from January 1st, 2024, to March 13th, 2024, the landing page in German received the highest number of visits, with 56,128 visitors (compared to 14,407 visitors last year), making it the second most visited subpage of the www.visitljubljana.com website during this period. Following closely behind, in third place for visitation during the mentioned period, is the landing page for the LUV festival in English, with 53,128 visitors. Landing pages for the LUV festival in other language versions did not make it into the top 10 most visited landing pages during this period. Overall, all pages related to the LUV festival (in all language versions) were visited by a total of 87,405 visitors (compared to 56,966 last year), accounting for 20.64% of all website visitors during this period. The total page views were 159,529 (compared to 155,597 last year), accounting for 14.99% of all page views on the website during this period. Moreover, testimonials from participants and attendees attest to the festival's success in fostering a sense of connection and celebration within the city.

The success of the LUV festival likely relied on several key factors:

1. Strategic planning: a well-defined strategy and clear objectives have laid the foundation for the festival's success. This includes identifying target audiences, establishing key performance indicators, and outlining a comprehensive action plan.
2. Effective partnerships: collaboration with a wide range of partners, including cultural institutions, local businesses, and tourism organizations, was crucial. Strong partnerships enhanced the festival's program, expand its reach, and increased community engagement.
3. Innovative program: offering a diverse and innovative program with over 130 events contributed to the festival's appeal. Creative program, including music concerts, art installations, workshops, and culinary experiences attracted diverse audiences and keep them engaged throughout the event.
4. Media visibility: generating significant media coverage through strategic PR efforts and media partnerships helped us raise the awareness of the festival.
5. Digital marketing: leveraging digital marketing channels, including social media, email marketing, and online advertising, was essential for promoting the festival and reaching target audiences.
6. Community engagement: engaging with the local community and soliciting feedback was critical for ensuring the festival's relevance and success. Involving community members in the planning process, incorporating their suggestions, and addressing their concerns can foster a sense of ownership and support for the event.
7. Financial management: effective budgeting, resource allocation, and financial oversight were essential for ensuring the festival's financial sustainability.

What makes LUV fest unique and stand out from other similar types of events:

1. LUV Fest is specifically designed to address the issue of seasonal tourism fluctuations by attracting visitors during the traditionally quiet months of February and March.
2. While many festivals have themes, LUV fest uniquely revolves around the broad and inclusive concept of love. It celebrates love in all its forms—romantic love, love for family and friends, self-love, love for art and culture, and love for the city. This thematic focus creates a cohesive and emotionally engaging experience for attendees, differentiating it from other events that may have narrower themes.



3. The festival offers a wide range of activities that collectively create a rich cultural experience.
4. LUV features distinctive art installations that transform the cityscape. LUV also supports local NGOs like Ana Monro Street Theatre and Imago with Gregorjevo.
5. The festival actively involves a wide range of local stakeholders, including cultural institutions, artists, hospitality businesses, and service providers. This collaborative approach not only enhances the festival's program but also strengthens community bonds and supports local economies.
6. LUV caters to a broad audience, including different age groups and communities such as the LGBTQ+ population. This inclusivity ensures that the festival resonates with a diverse group of attendees, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement.



