# Local Products in a Protected Area: Supporting the Preservation of Tradition, the Development of the Local Economy, and an Authentic Visitor Experience

Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia
Plitvice Lakes National Park
Protected Areas (including public natural or cultural parks)
Visitor Experience & Destination Management

**Summary of Good Practice Story**
Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia's oldest and most-visited protected area drawing around 1.5 million visitors annually, historically offered generic souvenirs and hospitality products largely indistinguishable from anywhere else, even as local agricultural production in the surrounding Lika region had shrunk as residents shifted from farming toward tourism work. The park's management coordinated its Hospitality, Retail and Procurement divisions to source Lika Quality-certified regional products — food, beverages, souvenirs and cosmetics — through the externally-run Lika Destination Cluster and Lika Coop, following public procurement rules that let small producers reach the market via restaurants like Lička kuća (featuring 10-15 certified products annually) and souvenir shops, backed by a promotional video and information catalogue. Rather than aiming to grow park revenue, the goal was purely to diversify the visitor offer; 2025 souvenir shop data showed magnets and keyrings made up nearly 60% of sales, with spirits, honey and jams filling the rest. The lesson: protected areas and destination managers serve as a vital bridge connecting small-scale, seasonal local producers with visitors seeking authentic regional flavours — even limited production quantities have real value precisely because of their uniqueness and connection to place.

**Setting the Scene: Destination & context**

The Plitvice Lakes National Park is the oldest and largest national park in the Republic of Croatia. It is also the country's most visited protected area and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. All of this entails a significant responsibility in terms of protecting natural values, developing sustainable practices, strengthening the hospitality and tourism sector, and creating more stable living conditions for the local population. Certified under the regional Lika Quality scheme, local products have found a market and sales channel within our national park. This area has become an indispensable catalyst for the development of the wider region, driven by tourism and sustainable practices. As part of the many initiatives aimed at integrating sustainability into every aspect of our operations, the inclusion of local products from the wider region beyond the national park has created a small but meaningful bridge, helping us maintain the longstanding connection between the local community and visitors to this exceptional area.

**The Turning Point: Why change was needed**

Aware that the demand for products in the hospitality and retail sectors is far greater than the availability of local products, we have nevertheless endeavored to achieve a balance between supply and demand. Recalling a time when the national park purchased substantial quantities of agricultural products for use in its hospitality operations, we were fully aware that such possibilities are no longer available today. The reason is quite simple: local residents are increasingly turning to tourism and moving away from agriculture, making it impossible for local production to satisfy, on a larger scale, the demand generated by an area that welcomes around 1.5 million visitors each year. This is why local products gradually found their way into the offer. It was recognized that local products were largely absent from hospitality establishments and souvenir shops, which instead relied on generic products that were very similar to those available elsewhere on the market. However, sourcing products from local producers offers multiple benefits for tourism stakeholders and the sustainable development of the destination. Sourcing goods and products locally provides revenue for local producers, thereby supporting employment growth, creating new job opportunities, and helping to curb population decline in rural communities.

**The Vision: What you set out to do**

An authentic destination experience has become a key motivation for a growing number of visitors. This trend in tourism aims to enhance visitor satisfaction by enabling guests to discover the authentic values of the destination they are visiting and experience it through the eyes of the local community. This may include tasting local cuisine, learning about traditional food preparation methods, discovering historic crafts, or observing the creation of traditional clothing. By promoting and selling products made by local producers, destinations contribute to the preservation of tradition and the protection of their cultural identity. Local products in the souvenir shops are clearly highlighted on shelves bearing the Lika Quality regional quality label, while restaurant menus feature the Lika Quality mark next to dishes made with locally sourced ingredients. Given the previous lack of such offerings within the national park, even the

introduction of purchasing local quality-certified products and offering them for sale on a consignment basis in the souvenir shops has created a new, albeit modest, market that provides both economic support and promotional opportunities for the wider local community.

**The Journey: How change happened**

The unique regional quality scheme for food, beverages, and souvenirs from the Lika region, identified by the Lika Quality label, is guided by sustainability principles aimed at connecting local products with diverse markets, among which Plitvice Lakes National Park is one of the key stakeholders. The certification process itself is not managed by the national park; rather, it is carried out externally through the Lika Destination Cluster and the Lika Coop agricultural cooperative. It is precisely the long-standing tradition of hospitality and hotel operations, together with more than a century of tourism activity in the area, that has positioned the national park as a protected area capable of offering visitors a diverse range of experiences, alongside the unparalleled opportunity to enjoy its natural wealth and its status as a UNESCO World Heritage natural site. Through its own restaurants, hotels, and souvenir shops, the national park offered a valuable channel for the promotion and sale of local products. Following a decision by the national park's management, and through the joint efforts of the Hospitality and Hotel Operations Division, the Retail Division, and the Procurement Department, a framework was established for the procurement of Lika Quality-certified products. It should be noted, however, that the procurement of local products and products protected by a geographical indication must be carried out in accordance with public and simplified procurement regulations, under which the terms of public procurement procedures are defined. It is precisely this legally defined framework that creates opportunities for the procurement of domestic products, enabling individual local producers, organized into agricultural cooperatives, to bring their products to market. Marketing also played a crucial role in ensuring that awareness of the new offering reached both visitors and the local community. A promotional video and an information catalog were developed, and in addition to providing extensive information about the national park's restaurants, bistros, and hotels, they also showcase the range of Lika Quality products on offer. The Lička kuća restaurant is perhaps best known for its use of these products, featuring between 10 and 15 Lika Quality food and beverage products in its annual offering. Like other restaurants within the national park that offer Lika Quality products, these items are clearly identified on the menu. On the national park's official website, under the Sustainability section, visitors can find information on the products that were available in the souvenir shops in 2023 and 2025. A major challenge lay in organizing procurement and estimating the quantities needed to match the demand. For sales in the souvenir shops, the process is somewhat simpler, as local producers affiliated with the Lika Quality agricultural cooperative make their products available through the cooperative, from which we then procure the products. In short, the process involves numerous stakeholders and begins with the national park's departments and units, which are responsible for meeting anticipated demand, ensuring compliance with the relevant legal framework, and promoting the products, thus paving the way for a more distinctive market offering.

**The Breakthrough: What you achieved**

The most significant positive outcome was the increased diversity of local products on offer, including food and beverages, souvenirs and handcrafted items, as well as cosmetics, none of which had been available before the introduction of these products. Because these products were certified under a scheme managed by an external organization that invites interested local producers to apply through public calls, their introduction at the regional level was a completely new initiative. The objective of Plitvice Lakes National Park was not to increase its own revenue through these products, but rather to provide visitors with a more diverse offering and an opportunity to discover local products that they might otherwise not encounter, whether through gastronomy or through souvenirs. Available data from the souvenir shops for 2025 show that almost 60% of sales were generated by magnets and keyrings, while spirits, honey, and jams accounted for the remaining 40%. As these products are available in a range of sizes and volumes (particularly honey, spirits, and juices), visitors are offered a wider choice of items to take home as souvenirs or gifts, depending on their mode of travel to and from the destination.

**Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn**

Offering local products, particularly food products in hospitality establishments, presents a significant challenge, as their production capacity is often insufficient to meet all of the restaurants' needs. As a result, these products are purchased in quantities that are expected to be used in full, with additional purchases made when necessary, thereby meeting demand without generating excess food waste. Another significant challenge is the instability of production. Although this creates challenges, it also highlights the value of these products, which are inherently influenced by many external factors. While local producers may never be in a position to achieve large-scale production, it is crucial that the products they create through considerable effort and commitment reach visitors and tourists. The needs of the hospitality sector in an area that attracts a large number of visitors are strongly influenced by seasonality, which also affects demand for these products, as it is undoubtedly lower during the winter months than in the summer season. The stability of both production and demand is definitely a challenge. However, protected areas, destination management organizations, and tourism boards represent a vital link between local producers and visitors who want to discover the traditional flavors and aromas that are an important part of almost every local community.

**The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact**

By purchasing and promoting local products, the traditions of the Lika region are preserved, the development of the local economy is supported, and visitors are provided with an authentic experience of the destination. Alongside unforgettable experiences of the National Park's natural attractions, visitors leave with a meaningful product that they associate with the special moments spent in this protected area. The quantities of local products available may not be sufficient to meet the needs of millions of people, but that is precisely where their undeniable value lies. Almost every handcrafted souvenir is unique, while the small-scale production of fruit

preserves, cheese, spirits, and juices embodies the very principles of sustainability we seek to promote. These products will undoubtedly find appreciative owners and discerning palates that recognize and value the local heritage, shaped by both nature and the culture that permeates it.

**Awards or Certifications**

1. Award Received by the Lička kuća Restaurant: https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/licka-kuca-dobitnik-nagrade-suncokret-ruralnog-turizma/
2. Award Received by the Lička kuća Restaurant: https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/licka-kuca-osvojila-tripadvisor-nagradu-za-2023/
3. Award Received by the Lička kuća Restaurant: https://www.plitvickivjesnik.hr/vijesti/licka-kuca-uvrstena-medu-top-100-restorana-u-hrvatskoj

**Web Articles**

1. National Park Brochures (Information Catalog): https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/en/brochures/
2. Certified Products – 2025 Catalog: https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/en/certified-local-products-2025/
3. Certified Products – 2023 Catalog: https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/certificirani-lokalni-proizvodi-2023/

**Other Relevant Links**

1. Inclusion of the Lička kuća Restaurant in a Gastronomic Guide: https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/licka-kuca-i-black-river-steak-pasta-house-uvrsteni-u-prestizni-medunarodni-gastronomski-vodic-gaultmillau-croatia/
2. About the Lika Quality System: https://www.lika-destination.hr/regional-quality-system/
3. Announcement of the Public Call for Lika Quality Products (information shared in Plitvički vjesnik): https://www.plitvickivjesnik.hr/vijesti/otvoren-javni-poziv-za-lika-quality-prilika-za-proizvodace
4. Traditional Hosting of the Plum Festival (Plitvički vjesnik): https://www.plitvickivjesnik.hr/vijesti/miris-tradicije-i-okusa-odrzan-7-festival-sljiva-u-nacionalnom-parku-plitvicka-jezera
5. Lička kuća restaurant: https://np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/en/plan-your-visit/hospitality-facilities/national-restaurant-licka-kuca/
6. Promotional video: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GDEfrMGc4aFbpPzciObtWgbtZiUz_Lk5/view?usp=sharing

**Quotes or Testimonials**

We are a family-run farm and have been engaged in beekeeping since 2005. We produce different varieties of honey and seek to market them through retail channels. Most of our products are sold directly from the farm and at the local market, while a portion of them is also marketed through the souvenir shops of Plitvice Lakes National Park. Sales through the souvenir shops began in 2018 under a consignment sales agreement, with the Lika Coop

agricultural cooperative acting as an intermediary. We receive orders through the cooperative, then deliver the products, and at the end of each month we receive a report on the products sold along with the corresponding payment. We gained access to the souvenir shops thanks to the Lika Quality label, which we hold for two types of honey produced in the Lika region: honeydew honey (forest honey) and meadow honey. We have been part of this scheme since its inception in 2017, when we applied for the first call for the award of the label. Since then, we have submitted a new application every two years, in line with the period for which the right to use the label is granted. The souvenir shops stock our smallest honey jars (250 g). Although sales volumes are relatively modest, they still contribute to our income and help increase the visibility of our products. We are proud that our honey is available in Croatia’s most famous national park, where visitors from around the world can purchase it and, through it, gain a deeper appreciation of the area's rich and well-preserved natural environment. We are satisfied with the sales results, particularly at the dedicated Lika Quality sales outlet at Entrance 1, where the products are prominently displayed and clearly distinguished from other items on offer. This presentation helps visitors perceive these products as having distinctive value, contributing to stronger sales at that particular location.