

Preservation and development of the natural and cultural heritage of the Poljane Valley

With the desire to preserve and sustainably develop the natural and cultural heritage of the Poljane Valley, the Municipality of Gorenja vas - Poljane in 2020 joined the national initiative of the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) called the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism (ZSST), which advocates sustainable development of destinations in Slovenia.

In essence, the national scheme, through various measures, education, workshops and other applied approaches, helps individual destinations to identify key sustainable elements, and through various activities to encourage local people, local community and companies in the wider field of tourism to be aware and plan their 'green' sustainable future.

Among the important measures of the destination that are competing for the Slovenia Green label is the reporting on the adopted sustainability principles and individual sustainability indicators to the local and wider regional and national community and to all visitors of the destination. To this end, the Municipality of Gorenja vas Poljane has prepared a transparent set of some of the most important environmental indicators (47 in total), which indicate the sustainable efforts of the destination.

The area of the municipality of Gorenja vas - Poljane is definitely one of the green destinations, as the green colour of the unspoiled environment is visible at every step. The destination is one of the most forested areas in Slovenia with a low percentage of urbanised areas. A total of 7,530 people live in the municipality, with an average of 49 living per km², which is less than the Slovenian average of 102 per km². There are also no major industrial plants or intensive agricultural land in the area. The landscape component of the environment thus largely reflects the scattered settlement on the flat sunny terraces of the Škofja Loka hills and the settlements along Poljanska Sora River in the valley bottom. The share of natural areas or nature in the municipality thus amounts to more than 90%,¹ which clearly indicates the preservation and care for nature. As a result, the air quality in the area is at a very high level, and waste collection and wastewater treatment are also exemplary.

¹The research made on the comparative analysis of data sets - With the help of the Environmental Atlas of the Environmental Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for 2019 (last official available data), the Public Graphic Data Viewer MAFF and the percentage of forests showed that there is 92.7 undeveloped areas in the destination or municipality.

The rich natural component of the environment is in line with the millennial history of settlement, where the continuity of settlement is visible from the former preserved settlement cores (today's archaeological remains) to medieval settlements and individual older settlements and farms, which shows the continuous awareness to sustain the local rural area by the locals. Today, there are 92 protected objects of immovable cultural heritage, two fully protected village cores and two wider areas of protected cultural landscape. The cultural heritage of the area has also been recognised by UNESCO, as bobbin lace from the area is inscribed on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. The preservation of cultural heritage is taken care of by seven museums or museum collections in the entire area.

The Poljane Valley is surrounded on all sides by unspoiled nature, as evidenced by the many protected areas of Natura 2000, such as the areas of Blegoš and Poljanska Sora River and a large number of areas declared as natural values of national and local importance. These larger areas are evenly distributed throughout the territory and are additionally enriched by over 31 individual points of natural value, of which as many as 21 belong to points that are protected at the national level. The municipality also has a diverse flora and fauna, and based on the Report of the Environmental Agency of the Republic of Slovenia, it is not recorded that protected species from the CITES list were illegally hunted, sold or resold in the destination.

Due to its diversity, the Poljane Valley invites you to take a bike trip. To this end, six bicycle rental areas have already been established in the municipality, and even more are planned for establishment in the near future. The municipality is also working faster and is involved in projects for the construction of a larger number of bicycle paths.

Representatives of local entities and tourism try to educate providers in the field of tourism on sustainable development through various media publications and especially personal approaches, thus showing them the possibilities for improvement in their business in the direction of obtaining sustainable certificates, which are internationally valid confirmation of their efforts.

The vast majority of more than 100 indicators included in the report for obtaining the Slovenia Green label show that the Municipality of Gorenja vas - Poljane is recognised as a green, healthy and sustainable destination in both national and local levels.

As awareness of the importance of sustainable development in tourism and all the benefits it brings within the destination at a high level, local authorities also work diligently and meet the well-defined goals of the national scheme and will do so as much as possible in the future.