



A BLOG ABOUT DESTINATIONS AND MATTERS RELATED TO THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY



Destination Marketing – it’s really about the people

by Pádraic Gilligan, Managing Partner,
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In our work with the [Slovenian Convention Bureau](#) we are currently focusing on the brand value proposition for meetings and events taking our starting point from content created by Spirit Slovenia, the organisation with responsibility for the nation brand and the excellent “I Love Slovenia” campaign. While accepting that countries are not corporations and therefore never capable of being exclusively defined by a brand guidelines manual, the science of branding does provide useful perspectives and tools for impactful destination marketing.

Slovenian Energy

We spent the past week meeting a small selection of the vast cast of characters that, day by day, are actively contributing to Brand Slovenia and were left in no doubt about “Slovenian Energy”, the foundation pillar of the brand value proposition of the Slovenian Convention Bureau:



Slovenian Energy is different. It's naturally laid back. Relaxed. Calm. Not all sparkly on the outside but then running quickly out of fizz. It's slow release, enduring, in it for the long haul. Slovenia energy is there when you need creative input in planning your event. And it's there throughout the event journey, right until the end when your attendees give you a standing ovation for a job well done. With you all the way.

Brands are "activated" more than ever when they're lived and last week in Portorož, Goriška Brda and the Soča Valley, three magnificent contrasting regions in this small country of two million souls we met so many people who live and breath Slovenian energy, who define what's new, unique and different about this intriguing nation. Here are five of them:

Aleš Kristančič, Movia Wines



Aleš Kristančič of Movia Wines is one of those rare individuals who instantly ignites a room with his energy. We meet him in Goriška Brda where his family has been making wine since 1820.

He joins us late, direct from the vineyard in jeans and sleeveless "wife-beater". He's monitoring the vines for signs of harvest like a dairy farmer watches a calving cow. He's a bit tense but the tension drains out of him as he speaks about his "terroir".

There's an earthy, gritty passion about Aleš that's deeply infectious, that builds connections, that draws you in. We taste a bunch of different wines, mainly white and amber colour, eat some amazing home produced salami and watch the harvest moon rise up over the valley.

Dada Jerovšek, The Kaval Group



Dada Jerovšek is an architect turned entrepreneur who heads up The Kaval Group, a collection of 19 bars, fine dining restaurants, casual cafes and, of course, Lolita, the ice cream enterprise currently riding high on the SoolNua #worldICECREAMindex.

She's puts in 14 hour days but always makes time for "aesthetics, design ... the finer things in life". When you ask her what are her favourite Slovenian brands she replies, as if on cue:

Slovenia itself, with all of its natural beauties such as Bohinj, Bled, Gorenje, Rogaška and countless more!

The Kaval Group is made up of hospitality experiences that are undeniably Slovenian yet comparable with any contemporary trend from New York or London.

Ana Roš, Hiša Franko



Ana Roš studied Political Economy in Trieste but then returned to Kobarid in the Soča Valley to run Hiša Franko, the family business of her husband, Valter. Together they have turned Hiša Franko into a highly awarded destination restaurant based on Ana's highly individual cooking style.

Before a truly memorable 10 course tasting menu, she takes us around the kitchen garden pointing out the produce that will later feature on our plates. We also meet the arctic char and native Soča trout that she serves nightly.

The cheese and wine cellars continue the 0-km theme with all produce sourced in the immediate vicinity of the restaurant. Local foragers are highly paid for the berries and fruits they bring.

In building up Hiša Franko Ana and Valter spent many years travelling the world, eating at signature restaurants and learning from world renowned chefs. They now infuse their highly "local" food presentations with global best practices and bring true world class gastronomy to Slovenia.

Borut Nikolaš, The Maya Team



Borut Nikolaš, aka Nidjo, has the perfect job: he has managed to turn passion into profession although, in the process, has had to somewhat curtail his own desire for adrenaline in favour of making it available – safely – to others. Nidjo, a skilled kayaker, started offering adventure activities on the Soča River way back in 1998 and has since developed a corporate business offering themed team building sessions all over Slovenia and beyond.

Patrick and I are privileged to spend a day with him and the Maya team in his natural habitat and are hugely impressed by his ability to simultaneously push us out of our comfort zones and make us feel safe. He gives us mountain bikes and leads us off-road on spectacular forest trails, across a wooden bridge, high over the limpid waters of the turquoise Soča River; then he puts us in Kayaks and lets us feel the freedom of the waters beneath us; finally he teaches us to work together and navigate the awesome power of white water on a raft.

Throughout our experience he's supervising, watching, protecting, coaxing us out of our sanitised urban cocoon and immersing us – often physically – in the astonishing power of the natural world.

Miha Kovačič, Slovenian Convention Bureau



Many people in the MICE industry know Slovenia because of Miha Kovačič. If it's possible for one person to sum up in his personality all that's great and appealing about a destination then Miha does this for Slovenia. He personifies Slovenian energy with his easy, laid-back style, his quiet confidence, his genuine but never over-bearing friendliness. He incarnates Slovenian energy with his enduring resilience, his dogged consistency, his relentlessness.

Miha has come to public sector destination marketing via university in Germany and a number of years on the DMC and hotel side. This means he knows Slovenia intimately from the perspective of the client. He has run incentive programmes, operated large conferences, designed special events all in fulfillment of corporate or association objectives. He knows how to tailor Slovenia to the precise needs of a small or large association, how to customise it for high end incentive travel experiences, how to present it for a special corporate event.

He also knows, instinctively, that destinations communicate most powerfully in and through their people. People channel passion and it's this passion that ignites the spark of connectivity, binding you to a place, building its brand value proposition easily and naturally in your mind.

Thank you Miha for connecting us to the heart and soul of Slovenia through some of its amazing ambassadors – Aleš, Dada, Ana and Nidjo.

Pádraic Gilligan is Managing Partner at SoolNua, a boutique consultancy offering marketing, strategy and training for destinations, hotels and venues in the MICE sector. SoolNua is proud to work on behalf of the Slovenian Convention Bureau.

- See more at: <http://padraicino.com/destination-marketing-its-really-about-the-people/#sthash.BirCIY9a.dpuf>