

*The undiscovered magical
hinterland of Slovenian
Istria*





Krajevna skupnost Gradin

Brezovica pri Gradinu 1b
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Beautiful nature, charming, clustered stone villages, hospitable locals with a pleasant, melodic dialect, and excellent cuisine will strongly impress the visitor of Slovene Istria, who travels along the narrow winding roads in the hinterland of the Slovenian coast.

Distance from cities is an advantage in these places. Unspoiled nature, clean air, silence, and excellent spring water, will embrace the visitor with peace and contribute to better well-being. A short getaway or long vacation in Green Gradin will offer you a complete retreat from the noise and rush of everyday life and, is therefore a unique experience.

Many natural sights and cultural treasures are hidden in these mysterious and remote places. The heavy Istrian soil brings its goodies every season - in spring nature offers cherries and wild asparagus, in the summer the gardens and meadows are full of tasty veggies, aromatic herbs, and spices. The autumn is time for truffles, mushrooms, and grape harvest followed by olive picking and ripe persimmons. The real celebration of abundance! Winters are colder than on the coast and the winds are stronger, but also the time when nature rests is wonderful.

The locals are friendly and connected. Villagers connect through the working actions. On these occasions groups of locals clean forest paths together, repair dry stone walls, typical for the area, arrange the surroundings of cemeteries and help each other with grape picking. These working actions are always followed by a celebration. Typical Istrian music, singing, dancing, excellent food and good wine are an integral part of every festival. The locals like to welcome visitors into their company, tell stories from the past, and forge genuine friendly ties with their guests.

You are cordially invited to the Green Gradin, to an unforgettable experience of a different holiday.

Accommodation

In Green Gradin, tourism is at its beginnings, so there are only a few possibilities for accommodation. However, the existing ones are designed and furnished with good taste in a traditional style and offer a unique experience of living.

Page 5 – 8

Culinary

The cuisine of the Istrian hinterland is known for the specialties that the visitor in Green Gradin must try. These include homemade pasta (fuzi), polenta, gnocchi, various stews, and venison. Traditional dishes are prepared with different meat products (prosciutto, pancetta, blood sausages, sausages), delicious cheeses (sheep, goat, and cow), and eggs.

Page 10 – 13

Stunning Wine

On the sunny terraces of Gradin hills, vines, which have been traditionally grown in Istria for centuries, grow beautifully. A vine-covered pergola can be found in front of almost every house. In the past, farmers produced wine for their own needs without the right knowledge, so traditional varieties such as Malvasia and Refošk were not appreciated.

Page 15 – 18

Nature

The hinterland of Slovenian Istria hides many natural beauties worth visiting that will leave you in surprise. The tranquil landscape is inspiring, the views of the Istrian hills to the sea are spectacular, from the peaks we can observe colourful sunsets that colour the sky with pink, purple, orange, and red shades, as the sun descends into the sea.

Page 24 – 25

Crafts

In remote places of the Istrian hinterland, we can find masters of old crafts and traditional skills. In small villages, which can be reached by winding roads and narrow paths passing by a stone made Istrian houses, we find people who still live closely connected with nature, know its rhythm and the secrets of the local flora and fauna.

Page 20 – 22

Heritage

The hinterland of Slovenian Istria has an extremely rich history, so all the treasures of the architectural and cultural heritage that we find here are interesting and unique.

Page 27 – 30

Accommodation





Hiša Kižin

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Boštjan Pavlič

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Modern holiday house Kižin consists of two air-conditioned apartments with a common entrance, which can be used separately or together (total number of guests: 12). Apartment Kižin has 3 bedrooms (up to 6 people), a comfortable living room with fireplace and TV, a fully equipped kitchen, a large balcony, bathroom, and toilet.

For young and young at heart, there is a one-bedroom apartment Kižin Roof (up to 6 people), located in the attic and equipped with pallet furniture, a kitchenette with a small refrigerator, living room with TV, bathroom, and balcony on the roof.

The house has a seasonal outdoor pool, a large Mediterranean garden with a fireplace, and a terrace with a tennis table. There are free wi-fi and parking available. For short trips around the surrounding area, bicycles can be rented, and in the evenings the host can arrange a real Istrian evening with traditional Istrian live music. From the hosts, guests at the workshop can also learn how to prepare Istrian pasta (fuži) and baking homemade bread.

For unforgettable memories, they offer you a photo session with beautiful Istrian scenery.

The local shop is only a few steps away from the accommodation.





Villa Korone

Brezovica pri Gradinu 6a, 6272 Gračišče

Igor in Marko Mikolič
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Villa Korone is located in the center of the Brezovica village and offers accommodation for 13 guests in a modern apartment with a kitchen that can accommodate 4 people and in three rooms for 3 people, with a private bathroom each. Villa Korone is located at an extremely beautiful location. On one side it is surrounded by unspoiled nature - there is a large terrace for socializing and relaxation with a swimming pool, and on the other side of the villa is a typical Istrian village with houses made of stone. Villa Korone is ideal for guests who want a peaceful holiday with various activities (cycling, hiking) in direct contact with nature. The owner of the villa is a musician who likes to brighten up an evening with his live music.



Villa Gradin

Gradin 1, 6272 Gračišče

Stane in Varja Jug
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Villa Gradin provides its guests with peaceful and relaxed accommodation in the heart of nature. It is suitable for families or groups of friends who wish to explore the natural treasures of Istria and spend an active vacation together. Villa Gradin is a contemporarily furnished holiday house that boasts traditional Istrian architecture. Its private land covers 4000m². It offers comfortable accommodation for 12-14 people, in 6 bedrooms. Two are equipped with double beds and a private bathroom, two bedrooms with a large double bed, and two with two or three single beds. The house is fully air-conditioned and features floor heating. Villa Gradin has above-standard equipment; it has a heated pool, Finnish and bio sauna, and a spa with a fitness area and a children's playground. The big common room offers numerous possibilities for free time: there is a pool table, hand football, wall darts, PlayStation, and brick fireplace. Behind the house is a spacious terrace with a barbeque to prepare outdoor meals. The house has an indispensable cable TV and free wifi access. Parking for six vehicles is provided in front of the villa.



Villa Topolovec

Topolovec 10a, , 6272 Gračišče

Bojan Funa

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Villa Topolovec is a beautiful holiday accommodation in three separate stone houses, restored in traditional Istrian style. It can accommodate 15 people. The first unit is a stone house with a separate entrance, with a living room on the ground floor and a bedroom on the upper floor. On the ground floor of the second house are a lounge and dining room with darts and a billiard table. The kitchen is comfortably equipped and separated from other rooms. On the first floor, there are three bedrooms for a total of nine guests and two bathrooms. There is a covered terrace with barbecue facilities. The third house has a kitchen with a large dining table, a toilet on the ground floor, and two bedrooms, one on each floor, for a total of five guests.

Accessible from the outdoor area are two separate toilets and a laundry room. For the pleasure of the youngest, there is a small swing in front of the villa. In front of the house, there is also an outdoor pool, and the plot is surrounded by traditional stone walls. The panoramic view of the landscape to the sea is stunning.

A grocery store in Brezovica is 7 km from Villa Topolovec.

Only 1 km away is restaurant Belvedur offering traditional Istrian dishes. Guests can arrange breakfast or a traditional local dinner with the apartment owner.



Sunny hill

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The Sunny hill permaculture homestead offers simple accommodation in a former rectory, restored with natural materials. The house has clay plasters and wooden floors. The common areas include a bathroom with two showers, a large kitchen, and a living area. In the garden behind the house, there is a summer kitchen and a fireplace. Three guest rooms with two or three beds, one single room, and a 'hostel' room that offers 6 beds on three bunk beds can accommodate max. 14 people.

Next to the main building is a separate unit with its bathroom and kitchenette, that can accommodate up to 4 people.

By prior arrangement, guests can join for lunch or dinner with the hosts. The food on Sunny Hill is mostly organic, and the vegetables and spices are grown in their permaculture gardens.

At Sunny Hill, they organize cultural evenings or socialize by the bone fire with music. Guests from the house and surroundings are welcome.

*Rich flavours of the
Istrian hinterland*





Gostilna Belvedur

Belvedur 1, 6272 Gračišče

Sandi Tripar

(05) 657 40 22

The Belvedur inn opened its doors back in 1969. At that time, Sandi's grandmother Marija, better known as Slavka, her partisan name, was the kitchen master. For almost 20 years, she spoiled the hungry guests with her delicious food, while taking care of her family and the home farm. In 1976, the inn had temporarily closed. The smell of good food attracted guests to the restaurant again only years later, when Sandi took over the kitchen, of course under the watchful eye of grandmother Slavka. His excellent cooking is still based on home-made Istrian dishes, from home-baked bread, hand-made pasta - "fuži", potato dumplings - "njoki", and other traditional delicacies.

The food is of local origin. What they do not grow at home, they get from the local farmers and hunters. Sandi introduced truffles in the traditional cuisine and thus brought the Belvedur inn on the world map of fans of these aromatic tubers. Autumn, when the surrounding forests smell of rare white truffles, is the best time to visit Belvedere and indulge in Sandi's creations on the spacious terrace, in the shade of a walnut tree. Throughout the rest of the year, the guests can enjoy a variety of dishes combined with more common but still delicious black truffles or mushrooms that grow in the forests of Green Gradin.

By the sound of the local dialect, the visitor can experience the essence of Istria with all their senses. Sandi cordially welcomes every guest and disarms anyone who comes to Belvedur with his sincere smile. A visit to the Belvedur inn is a genuine experience that shouldn't be missed.



Catering Stepančič

Pregara 76, 6272 Gračišče

Nataša Stepančič

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Since 2015, the Stepančič family from the village of Reparec has been preparing catering for various occasions and celebrations. Nataša Stepančič is a true master in the preparation of home-made Istrian dishes, which she adapts seasonally. With the help of family members, she prepares home-made pasta - fuži bakes home-made bread and prepares meat specialties with locally produced meat. She enriches her dishes with truffles, asparagus, and mushrooms that grow in the surrounding area. They grow strawberries, from which they cook delicious homemade jam.

Catering Stepančič prepares food for groups of up to 200 people. They cater to family celebrations - birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, baptisms, communions, and business events. Not only is their food delicious and healthy, but they also deliver it to home or the company, and prepare a professional service (Russian buffet). In their offer are the most popular multi-course menus that include appetizer, stew, main course, and dessert.

They have been ranked among the 10 best catering services in Slovenia. Their reputation for excellent local Istrian cuisine and professional attitude extends beyond the borders of Slovenia to Croatian Istria.





Vinko Šavle – Istra Tartufi

Gradin 4, 6272 Gračišče

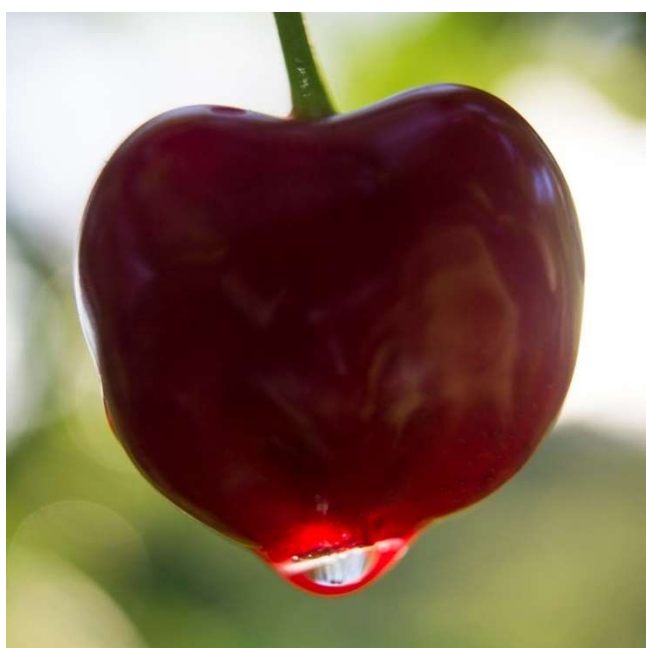
Vinko Šavle

041 399 407

Vinko Šavle has been dealing with truffles for more than 30 years, more precisely since 1988, when the company Adriacommerce had regularly bought white truffles in the village of Gradin and he recognized the possibility of additional earnings in the truffles trade. In the 1980s, yearly 5-6 tons of this magical tuber were collected in the vicinity of the village of Gradin.

The record year was 1989, with 6.8 tons of harvested truffles. With the help of his dog Kira, Vinko Šavle dug up a white truffle weighing as much as 780 grams and sold it in neighboring Italy for 11 million liras (today about 5,000 euros). Vinko's truffle traveled further to Alba, the world capital of truffles, where fashion designer Valentino paid as much as 45 million liras (approximately 20,000 euros) for it at an auction. And it was from the masters from Alba that Vinko learned the art of truffle trading. The trade ended with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, as the newly formed state of Slovenia banned the harvesting and trading of truffles by law. After nearly 5 years of battles with the bureaucracy, Vinko was able to register a craft to resell truffles and truffle-containing products again. This long struggle with the state apparatus was the reason why together with his friend Sandi Tripar (Belvedur Inn), a pioneer of Slovenian truffle cuisine and other eminent personalities of gastronomy founded the Association of Truffle Growers of Slovenian Istria. Among the founders was also Dino del Medico, who has received the award for the best culinary book "Truffles and Wine" at the World Gastronomic Fair in Beijing in 2005. With the help of the newly established association, they speeded the regulation of legislation and in 2011 re-legalized the collection and sale of truffles. In 2009, Vinko Šavle founded his own brand Istra Tartufi Šavle, under which he markets all truffle products and also truffles themselves. He spends most of his time wholesaling truffles inside and outside Slovenia. The rest of the energy is invested in the development of truffle products, which he prepares according to his recipes. The expert advice of his friend Sandi, a skilled craftsman who knows how to squeeze the best aromas out of each tuber, is of immense help in forging recipes.

Truffles are an aphrodisiac, so in ancient Greece, they were known as the food of the gods. For many years, Vinko has been making sure that bellies of truffles deity are always full, and at the same time he hopes that one day they will be gracious and give him the fairytale year of 1989 again.



Kmetija Juckić, Pavliči

Sirči 14b, 6272 Gračišče

Danilo Maršič

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The Juckić farm of the Maršič family is located in the Pavliči village, a small clustered settlement above the river Dragonja. The climate here is mildly Mediterranean, so cherries, vines, olives, and figs thrive. Pavliči is known for its delicious autochthonous variety of Pavliška cherry. More than 100 years ago, the cherry orchard was planted on Juckić farm by Peter Pavlič - Pijero Juckić. Since then, his descendants cultivate and propagate this old variety of crunchy cherries. 170 cherry trees are planted on a hectare of extensive orchards lying on steep hills with a beautiful view of the surrounding villages, the sea, and the mountains. Cherry trees are of different sizes, aged 5 to 40 years, the oldest still preserved is more than 100 years old. They have tall and lush canopies, planted on steep slopes that divide terraces. They are the most beautiful in April when they blossom with an extremely strong smell. The fruits are ripe in early June. The harvesting season lasts three weeks. Pavliška crunchy cherries are thick, firm, heart-shaped, very tasty, sweet, and long-lasting. The best of course is fresh. On the farm, they prepare various home-made products from cherries.

They are great for preserving in jams, juices, compotes or they make various sweets and cherry liqueur. Visitors are invited to try all the goodies, but they can join the locals and experience cherry-picking, gather the fruit into wicker baskets, climb high tree branches, or a ladder. During the season visitors can attend short workshops on how to prepare homemade cherry products. In addition to cherries, the farms also offer homemade olive oil and excellent wine, which was awarded as the best Refošk at the wine competition of the local community of Gradin in 2019.

Stunning wine





Reparec

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Vedran Stepančič

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The wine tradition has been present on the Stepančič farm for more than 200 years. Today the estate covers just under 21 hectares, of which 2 and a half hectares are planted with vines. They produce wine from the Refošk, Malvasia, and Yellow Muscat varieties. Their wines have received numerous awards at home and abroad. The farm is in the process of reorientation in certified ecological production. They are proud of the old variety of Refosko that they grow.

Visitors to their farm are offered guided tours of the estate, visits to historical sites, and a historically, ethnologically, and culinary rich program with a variety of experiences. On their farm is the oldest and largest preserved black kitchen in Istria. On the farm, they have been engaged in beekeeping for about a decade. Currently, they have 16 bee families and produce a total of about 160 kilograms of acacia, flower, and chestnut honey annually.

The younger generation has started a herb garden, where, in addition to lavender one can see rosemary, lemon balm, and chamomile also flourish. From the herbs, essential oils and hydrolats are produced. The most famous is the essential oil of lavender, the production of which is entirely manual, it is also harvested by traditional methods, with sickles. All family members strive to maintain the highest quality of domestic products, as shown by the results of the analysis. Their products achieve the highest level of quality in purity. From harvest to the distillation of a particular herb, it usually takes less than two hours. Distillation is carried out according to the highest standards and is time-intensive because it is necessary to maintain the optimal amount and temperature of water vapor throughout the distillation process. In addition to top-quality wine and healthy honey, visitors can also buy essential oils and hydrolate of the highest quality.



Družina Jakac

Pregara 38, 6272 Gračišče

David Jakac

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David Jakac and his family have been producing wine on their farm in Pregara since 2003. They cultivate the typical variety for the Istra region Refošk. They produce 6000 liters of this red wine per year. Grapes are usually harvested in the last days of September. The new wine is ready after six months.

David presents his wine at the traditional Festival of Refošk in Marezige, where his wines are regularly prized for exemplary cellaring and awards of excellence with silver and gold medals. There is a wine shop in the Jakac wine cellar in Pregara, where you can buy their top-quality wine.



Domačija pri Pičurju

Brezovica pri Gradinu 12, 6272 Gračišče

Joško Mezgec

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Winemaking has been a tradition for many generations at the homestead Pri Pičurju. Joško Mezgec took over the management of the farm from his father-in-law and built a beautiful, stone-vaulted cellar - canteen. A special feature in Pičur's canteen is the water stream flowing from a nearby spring. During the Christmas holidays, the family sets up a fabulous Christmas crib in the canteen. Their wine production is boutique, intended for the extended family and friends. Joško and his family are all extremely hospitable and friendly and they are happy to offer their wine to travelers and tourists who stop in the area for the beautiful nature and the distance from the bustling cities.

The main wines in Pičur's cellar are, of course, the "red king" Refošk and the "white queen" Malvasia. They also produce small quantities of sweet muscat and cabernet sauvignon. When working in the vineyard Joško follows traditional knowledge that is passed from preceding generations. However, during the wine production, he introduces some modern methods in cellaring, that he learns at courses and workshops for winemakers that he regularly attends.

Joško knows the past generations and according to the old traditional methods, he cooks grappa - local spirit from pomace cooked on the fire. This grappa is the basis for liquors of different tastes. He soaks in either the walnuts or anise or fennel or verbena - "Erba Luisa", as well as home-made cherries, plums, and pomegranates.

Visitors are always welcome to Pičur's home. Joško shows them his wine cellar and offers them a tasting of homemade drinks. They like to hang out with guests on the meadow next to the homestead or behind an old table made of stone in a nearby oak grove. They are also invited to see the nearby points of interest - the centuries-old home fireplace in the neighboring house of the Perič family, to a nearby spring, and cave Kubik, to old stone-built defense towers in Starci, the Veli vir waterfall, and the bean bell tower in Hrvoji.



Kmetija Grondali

Abitanti 10, 6272 Gračišče

Gracijan Perič

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The Grondali farm in the beautiful Istrian village Abitanti has a nearly 300-year tradition of grape and wine production. Indigenous Refošk wine from Abitanti was highly valued in the past, it was even sold across the border to Trieste. Refošk and Malvasia at Grondali are still produced traditionally. In 2005, Gracijan Perič restored an abandoned family house in a then empty village. In addition to wine, visitors to the homestead can try the traditional drink Biska - made from tropinovec (brandy obtained from grape pomace) and dry white mistletoe leaves. Gracijan also makes an excellent Refošk liqueur.

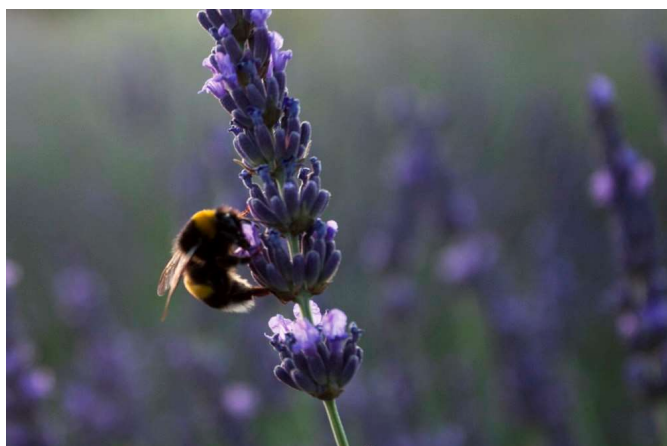
In 2014, his younger son Martin introduced Boskarin, the autochthonous Istrian gray-and-white breed of long-horned cattle, which has almost disappeared from Slovenian Istria. In the past, every farm had a Boskarin as it was a good working animal. Today Boskarin's meat and milk are highly valued because they contain a higher proportion of fat and protein. Martin also takes care of the bees and produces homemade honey and honey brandy from it.

In their two-hundred-year-old wine cellar, Gracijan welcomes smaller groups to offer them a wine tasting with a snack. Visitors can also buy wine and liqueurs for home. Recently they opened a guest room for socializing, with a big fireplace and a kitchen for the preparation of traditional Istrian dishes. The plan for the future is to build two tourist apartments, furnished in an authentic Istrian style.

Gracijan and Martin like to show to the visitors five special features of the village Abitanti: 500-years-old oak, 12 wells, arched balconies - baladurs, the oldest vine in the surrounding area and mulberries, on which silkworms were grown before the war.

*Forgotten crafts
and knowledge*





Herbalism and beekeeping

Gradin 5 , 6272 Gračišče

Marija in Dragan Vulić

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The couple Marija and Dragan Vulić are hospitable locals and pleasant company from the village of Gradin. Marija is a biologist who has devoted her entire life to plants and their mysterious ingredients. Formerly a schoolteacher is now retired and runs workshops for people who want to learn about the science of picking and processing medicinal herbs. She prepares creams, hydrolats, tinctures, tonics, teas, syrups, vinegar, massage oils, ointments, perfumes, and macerates from various herbs and their mixtures and teaches her students how to make it on their own. Her workshops on medicinal herbs are partly held outdoors, in the vicinity and in the higher-lying Rakitovec, where Marija teaches people how to recognize, pick, dry, and prepare herbs. She also sells her products.

For the last decade, her husband Dragan has been engaged in beekeeping and the production of bee products. He cares for 15-20 bee families and kindly shares his extensive knowledge of bees with others. He annually produces up to 120 kilograms of honey, mainly acacia, flower, and highly valued, chestnut. Dragan also produces beeswax, propolis, and pollen, and Marija uses these ingredients in her herbal preparations, which are of the highest quality.



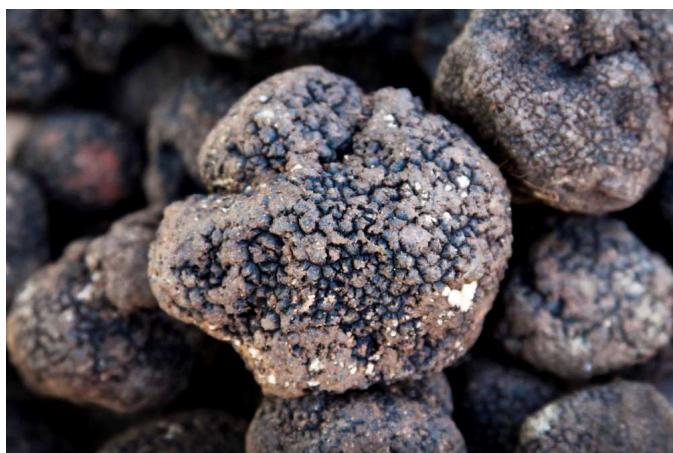
Carpentry and restoration of furniture

Pregara 2, 6272 Gračišče

Marijan Markežič,
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Marijan Markežič has more than 50 years of experience in woodworking and restoration of building and interior furniture. His knowledge of solid wood and wood carving is extensive, and for all these years from his hands have come extremely prized masterpieces that reach beyond carpentry knowledge. His work includes the superbly renovated interior of the Piran Pharmacy and the entrance door of the Pannonian Museum, as well as the doors of many churches in Slovenia and other elements of the restored architectural heritage. The work of his skillful hands are also the restored bookshelves of the Italian Gymnasium in Koper, he proudly says that before the visit of Pope John Paul II. to Slovenia, he restored a mighty throne on which the pope sat during a holy mass. In his carpentry workshop, Marijan gives life to old objects - cabinets, chairs, chests, and tables - this is his motivation to create and repair antiques for more than half a century. Every old object, be it a peasant's chair or an old baroque cupboard, he touches respectfully and carefully. Each object has its own story and history. Behind them are people who have used them, were attached to them, or those objects left a valuable mark in our cultural heritage. Restoration is a skill that requires not only a lot of knowledge but also a special feel for antiques. In their restoration, Marijan always makes an effort to restore the original charm of each object and bring it as close as possible to its original form. In order not to lose valuable knowledge, Marijan introduces his son to the craft, hoping that one day he will continue his father's work.

In addition to working with wood in his workshop, Marijan runs a homestead in Pregara, takes care of livestock, produces milk, and cultivates fields.



School for truffle hunter dogs

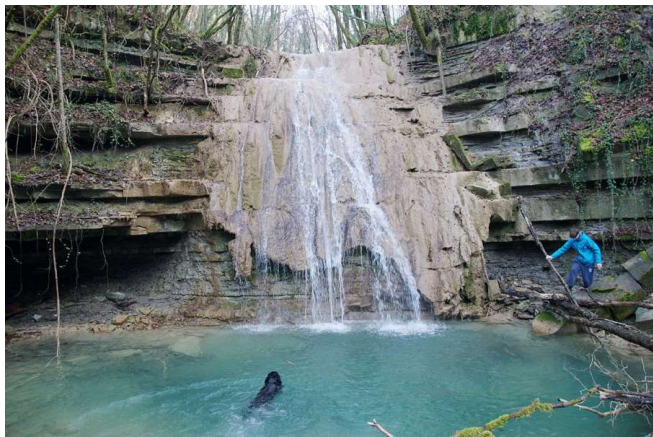
Belvedur, 6272 Gračišče

Kristjan Kocjančič

Kristjan Kocjančič has been a dog and nature lover since his early youth. Over the years, he combined these two loves and became a passionate truffle picker. The first step was to train his dog, with whom they were good friends. They spent a lot of time in the woods, where Kristjan found that his schooling as a truffle hunter was a great success. Since then, he has been raising truffle-picking dogs through play, without intimidation and rough grips. After about eight months of schooling, some dogs even earlier, they start looking for these prized Istrian tubers on their own. Currently, Kristjan has three dogs bred to look for truffles, who understand each other well and like to hang out on walks together. He believes that a satisfied dog is the best truffle hunter, so he makes his dogs feel good. Although it is the general opinion that the best breeds of dogs for finding truffles are the Lagotto Romagnolo and the Labrador, Kristjan believes that with the will and proper schooling any dog can find truffles. His first seeker was a mongrel, but he did his job perfectly. It is recommended that the dog we are trying to teach these skills is obedient and manageable, but the characteristics of the dog are of secondary importance compared to the characteristics of the owner. The human who owns the dog is the most important factor. He must have a sense of animals, deal with them a lot, and dedicate his time and love to them. Today, Kristjan teaches others how to train a dog - a truffle hunter. With interested visitors to Belvedur, he goes to the forest to look for truffles by prior arrangement. He introduces the participants to the course of the route, recommends appropriate clothing and footwear, and teaches them how to behave in nature and the company of dogs. Only then they can go on a truffle hunt. It is better if there are fewer participants in the group, as in a small group the experience is much more authentic. They drive to the area where the truffles grow, Kristjan reveals the secrets and stories of truffle picking during the search, and even recommends a recipe, as the time to find truffles can be unpredictable. We must not forget that this is a hidden treasure that trained dogs must discover. Harvesting takes place only in the truffle season. The season for white truffle is from September to January, and for black from May to August.

A photograph of a vineyard with rows of green grapevines supported by wooden stakes. The foreground is filled with tall grass and weeds. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. The text "Natural attractions" is written in a white, cursive font across the upper part of the image.

Natural attractions



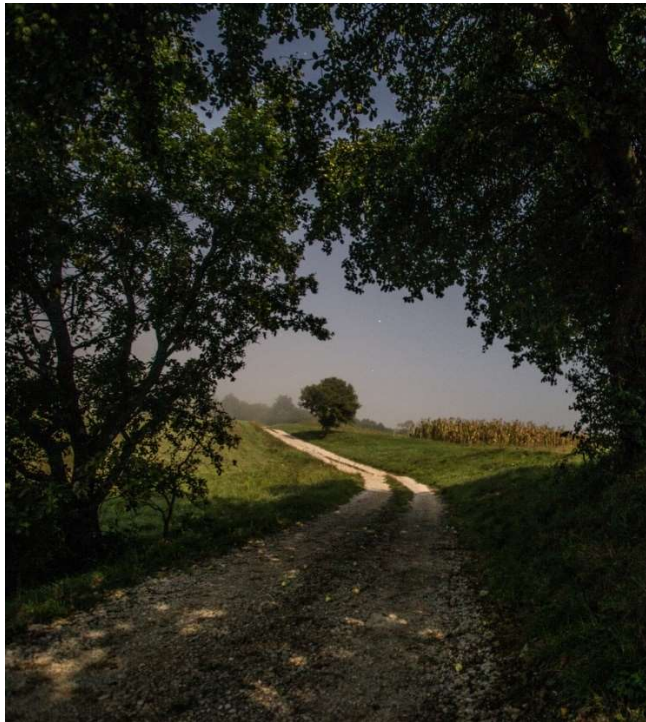
Waterfalls of Pasjak

Because there is little water in these places, the locals appreciate every stream and spring. In settlements, we often see wells and fountains where they collected water for everyday use. From late autumn to early spring, and in summer after stormy days, the **waterfalls of the Pasjak** stream are impressive. Access to the first and most famous waterfall is easy. In the village of Topolovec, past the church of Sv. Hieronymus the narrow path leads us into the valley where rivers Dragonja and Pasjak meet. From here we are only about 10-15 minutes walk away to a large rock pass, over which, depending on the time of year, more or less water flows. The second Pasjak waterfall is also, under favorable conditions, very mighty. The water flows down a thick tufa layer into a beautiful emerald pool. The path along the wild bed of the stream is overgrown with thorny vegetation, and in some parts, there is no path. In some places, the passages are exposed, especially in wet weather, and hikers have to help themselves with their hands.



Kubik spring

In 2014, the locals in the village of Brezovica near Gradin unexpectedly discovered the **Kubik spring**. In a common working action, in which local firefighters also took part, they wanted to clear the impassable path, but they found a spring that had been hidden for decades in a forest between the oak and acacia, overgrown with sagebrush and blackberry. In the past, along the Kobijok, as Kubik was called in the dialect, farmers fed the cattle and the stone troughs into which the water flows were used for washing clothes. The laundry was hand washed here until 1982. In 2016, the fabulous surrounding of the Kubik spring became the scene of a cultural event, the evening of dialect poetry. Near the spring is the Kubik cave, the entrance to which is difficult to access, although the cave then widens and deepens. With 292 m it is the second-longest flysch cave in Slovenian Istria.



Valley of Malinska

25

From Hrvoji to Abitanti, a 5 km long footpath leads through the magical **valley of Malinska**. It was named after several mills (Malin) that used to grind grain into flour in the past. In winter a lively river partly dries up during the dry months. Older locals remember that in the past, the water in the Malinska riverbed flowed throughout the year and freshwater crayfish were hunted in its clear pools. A walk through the valley brings calmness, nourishes walkers with fresh air, and enchants their ears with a birdsong.

The path on the left and right is surrounded by a forest that through the decades has overgrown the former meadows.



Heritage





Starci – two old defense towers

Brezovica

The village of Brezovica hides two old defense towers, which the locals call **Starci**.

They are really old, as they date back to the times of the Turkish invasions. The taller one measures 10 meters, while the lower one is quite damaged, the legend about the hidden treasure, which is supposed to be buried here, probably contributed to the damage. Judging by the excavated stones nearby, quite a few people have been looking for the treasure to this day.

The towers are placed at a height of 350 meters above sea level on the town, from where there is an exceptional view of the valley that opens towards Buzet. Since Starci is not a very crowded excursion point, the visitor can easily find his peace here, indulge his imagination, and travel five centuries into the past.





Fižolov zvonik - The Bean Tower

Hrvoji

The exact year of construction of the **church of St. Zenon** in Hrvoji, is not known, but it is believed that it was built in 1756 or 1791. The church has a quadrangular construction with a baptistery on the side. It was restored in 1855, in 2015 the façade and partially roof was restored, however, the interior is poorly preserved. Next to the church stands one of the tallest bell towers in Istria, 37.5 meters high. The bell tower was built in 1887 from sandstone. The locals called it a **bean tower** because they had to sell beans to build a bell tower with the money raised. In 1919, lightning struck the bell tower and severely damaged it, but it collapsed almost 70 years later in 1983. A new bell tower was erected in 1997.



Cerkev sv. Hieronima

Topolovec

Near the village of Topolovec is the almost **1000 years old church of St. Hieronymus**.

In its design, the Romanesque church lies on the hill below the village of Topolovec, in the place that is today called "Old Topolovec". Around the church is a wall that marks the former cemetery, surrounded by cypresses, where they used to carry defunct to bury even from distant places.

There is a story that under the church of St. Hieronymus a treasure was buried. For this legend, probably strangers smashed the altar and dug up the place where it stood.

In 2019, the church of St. Hieronymus was rebuilt and saved from ruin.





Active vacation or retreat into silence

Visitors to the green Gradin are surprised by the idyllic image of the stone villages. Vines climb the walls of the houses and small windows are characterized by wooden shutters. The village churches, which usually stand on lookout points, at a small distance from the center of the village, surrounded by the stone wall and a cemetery with many old graves and only a few family names. Descendants of former residents have been returning to secluded places in recent years, renovating old houses and reviving old customs. Short term visitors and those who spend their vacations here are all welcome. The area is ideal for lovers of outdoor activities as well as for those who enjoy long walks or simply reading a book, yoga, and meditation. The hilly landscape with sparse traffic is ideal for cyclists and runners, 30 km of marked hiking trails lead us across hills and valleys from village to village, hiding still undiscovered treasures. Exploring the bed of the Pasjak stream or the bed of the Dragonja River is an adventurous experience, where we will soak our feet or even jump into the cold water in the embrace of unspoiled nature.

Young members of the hunting family are replacing the classic rifle hunting with a more animal-friendly photo hunt, as the wide forests are the habitat of deer, roe deer, fox, pheasant, and wild boar. Beautiful nature, peace, and a relaxing environment offer perfect ambient for organizing silent retreats and weekend workshops with various themes. Healthy, locally grown food, herbal teas, a long walk, silence and a break from the digital world regenerate the body and mind in just a few days and restore freshness and well-being. Urban people, in contact with nature, can finally listen to the longings of their souls.



Traditional events

Socializing and celebrating are part of life in the Green Gradin. Traditional events; sausage festival - evaluation and tasting of Istrian sausages, evaluation of wine during the time of Sv. Martin, the competition in Mora Kantada - traditional games with coins or fingers, carnival, evenings of Istrian dialect and literature, and village festivals - šagra are joyful occasions, attended by locals and visitors from surrounding.

In Pregara, the šagra is in the middle of July, and in Hrvoji the second weekend in September. In Istrian villages, Šagra is a holiday celebrated on the patron saint of the village. The church ceremony is followed by a festive lunch. After lunch and in the evening, however, the šagra means fun with dancing and singing.

At the dances, people are entertained by the local musicians. The festival of local community Gradin is on September 15, the day when the whole of Primorska celebrates its return to its homeland.



KS Gradin

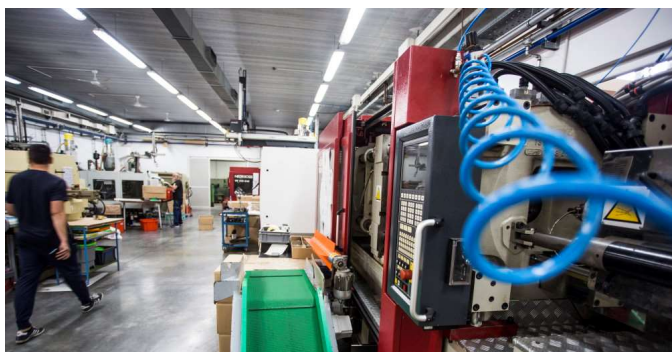
Nine settlements with many hamlets form the local community of Gradin that is the most remote local community in the Municipality of Koper. In the 1960s and 1970s, villages in the area were rapidly emptied due to a wave of emigration to major cities. People longed for better living and working conditions, and the infrastructure here was disorganized, with only farming offering a modest income. It was not until the 1980s that living conditions in the area slowly began to improve, and the villages gradually got asphalt roads and water supply. Several more decades passed before people started to return to abandoned homes, renovate and build houses, cultivate overgrown fertile areas and bring life back to empty villages.

Life right on the border with neighboring Croatia can be complicated. Once a single geographical area was divided after Slovenia's independence and centuries-old contacts between relatives and friends on both sides of the border were interrupted. With the establishment of the Brezovica small border crossing, maintaining contacts is easier, but still difficult.

In the community of Gradin, several associations are active, among them the oldest, the Voluntary Fire Brigade Gradin. Firefighters are certainly very important in the lives of the locals. They take care of fire safety but also participate in sports, cultural and other events. They are co-creators of local life and contribute to the development of the area.

The heart of the community is certainly the local store and bar in Brezovica. In addition to groceries and basic utensils, the store offers fresh, local, integral, and organically grown fruits and vegetables. The owner supports local farmers by offering visible space on the shelves for their products. They bake fresh bread in the shop and offer home delivery if needed. The bar next to the shop has a wide range of drinks, various hot drinks, salty and sweet snacks, and is a meeting point for the locals.

The owner of the shop and bar Bojan Markežič organizes social events that attract locals and



Catalog Green Gradin, 2020

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The project is co-financed: **SPIRIT Slovenija**



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA GOSPODARSKI
RAZVOJ IN TEHNOLOGIJO



EVROPSKA UNIJA
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NALOŽBA V VAŠO PRIHODNOST

visitors from the surrounding towns and the coast; events such as Summer in Brezovica, the carnival, the competition for the best Istrian sausage, Christmas gift exchange are traditional events that revive social life in the area. Bojan's shop and bar are located along the road 3 km before the Brezovica border crossing. Travelers like to stop here on their way to Croatia or on their way home to replenish their water supply and treat themselves to a refreshing drink or coffee before continuing their journey.

Near the shop, there is a community hall where locals meet for various celebrations, performances, events, and national events. It often features the local singing group Kantadore, which, thanks to the leader Stelijo Markežič, has more than a quarter of a century-long tradition of preserving the original local song and folk tradition.

In Brezovica, the industrial plant of plastic products Moplas has been operating since 1985, which in its best times employed up to 25 people, and now offers work to 8 people. It is a family company with modern equipment that successfully cooperates with Slovenian and foreign contractors. In the local community of Gradin, they know that opening to the world is important for the future. At the same time, they are well aware that mass tourism can spoil the beauty of this peaceful and pristine area that has a lot to offer to those who value it's the peaceful and unspoiled environment. So in recent years, they have invested a lot of effort and knowledge in the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism. Beautiful accommodations and the possibility of recreation in pristine nature, discovering natural and cultural sights, and genuine contact with masters of various traditional skills, are the attributes that will place the area on the world map of green, sustainable, and boutique tourism. The area attracts hikers who wander across the hills and valleys, empty roads and steep slopes are ideal for demanding cyclists. Clean air, silence filled with the sounds of nature and green, as far as the eye can see, are suitable for yoga retreats and various educational programs.