

BEST PRACTICE:

PROMOTION CAMPAIGN: BRDA CHERRY IN EVERY HOME & MAKE YOURSELF YOUR OWN CHERRY FESTIVAL

APPLICATION CATEGORY: Immediate responses in dealing with COVID-19 crisis

FULFILMENT OF CONDITIONS: Golden Slovenia Green destination, 4 accommodation providers carrying the label of sustainability (San Martin Hotel, Alma Vista, Breg Tourist Farm, Vita Villa) + 1 green attraction (Klet Brda)

PROBLEM IT ADDRESSES:

The basic problem, addressed by the "Brda Cherry in Every Home", was to introduce a sales channel for Brda farmers, who were looking forward to an excellent cherry harvest. Due to the epidemic, state borders, hospitality facilities, accommodation capacities, markets and education institutions in Slovenia were closed. This means that all channels used by the local farmers to sell their fruit were closed. They were looking forward to a harvest exceeding 600 tonnes of cherries, cherry trees were just about to bloom, the local farmers and the Brda Municipality, including the local tourist board (Brda Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport Board), were quite worried because they could not even imagine how long the epidemic would last.

The key problem was how to help farmers and how to avoid discarding more than 600 tonnes of high quality Brda cherries.

THE CHALLENGES OVERCOMES:

The **first challenge** that had to be tackled was to introduce collaboration and trust between the Brda Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport Board and the Association of Fruit Growers of Brda. The link with the Julian Alps Community has proven very useful, because the destinations in the community offered their help and locations for sale.

The **second challenge** was to introduce a system for promotion:

1. In the social media, all followers of the Brda destination profiles were encouraged to follow the product development procedure: from tree blossoming to cherry ripening, its first pink colour to complete maturity. Thus, we managed to gain the interest of followers to actually taste the cherries from Brda.
2. The tourist website www.brda.si published the list of locations in the Brda region and across Slovenia as well as a list of fruit growers who sell cherries. In this way, potential buyers were able to get contact details, locations and times for buying the cherries from Brda.
3. As a sign of gratitude as well as to enhance mutual collaboration during the epidemic, the team of the Brda Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport Board gave a basket of cherries to every municipality in the Soča region, in the Julian Alps Community and in the Goriška region, the Vipava Valley and the Karst, as well as to institutions in Ljubljana that collaborate with the Brda destination. In this way we managed to spread positive energy in the entire region and motivated people to visit Brda and buy more cherries.

The **third challenge** was to motivate fruit growers to inform the local tourist board about the cherries' sales points and times. In the past, fruit growers mostly depended on their own abilities and links that have for many small fruit growers proven deficient or instable during the epidemic.

The fourth challenge was to support the “Brda Cheery in Every Home” campaign and to share promotion activities as well as to motivate the local population. Thus, the destination has conveyed message that together we can overcome every challenge, even an epidemic.

SUCCESS ACHIEVED:

The “Brda Cherry to Every Home” campaign has achieved great success:

1. We have managed to preserve the previous sales trends of the Brda cherries, even more, we have managed to increase the sales. Fruit growers in Brda barely managed to satisfy all the demand. They almost doubled their sales on their own farms, i.e. in the destination.
2. For fruit growers and the local community, the campaign managed to open the path to a closer collaboration in sustainability and to encourage the promotion of local products.
3. The “Brda Cherry in Every Home” campaign connected the entire Slovenia, because fruit growers received calls from all over Slovenia, i.e. asking them to sell cherries in their places, from coastal municipalities to Maribor.
4. The campaign also had an additional effect. It attracted many buyers and people interested to pick cherries, including first-time visitors to Brda. Fruit growers, wine growers and hospitality services providers reported about exceptional visitation rates in the first weekends after the relaxation of measures introduced to prevent the spread of the epidemic in Slovenia.
5. The campaign has also shown the opportunity to safely organise the traditional cherry festival. The “Make Yourself Your Own Cherry Festival” event was actually the upgrade of the “Brda Cherry in Every Home” campaign that promoted the distribution of the event across the entire destination, which is essentially the main feature of sustainability. The entire destination did not feel the pressure of visits, but benefited from them, because visitors toured the destination by bikes, e-bikes or on walks, they tasted autochthonous local products, local enogastronomy, socialised and spent time with the local people. They felt safe, welcome and part of sustainable tourism in Brda. Hospitality services providers were able to relax after two months of zero income situation.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The main lesson that we have learned within the scope of the “Brda Cherry in Every Home” campaign and its continuation “Make Yourself Your Own Cherry Festival” was that even a simple campaign, infused with genuine hospitality, homeliness, authenticity and the concern for the environment is even more integrative within the destination as well as between the destination and the region than the most sophisticated campaigns. The local population were able to identify themselves with the campaign. We joined together in the care to help our farmers, we have realised that collaboration is vital, and that we will upgrade it with other new projects that will put the hospitality of the Brda region to the forefront. We have found that, in the post-epidemic time, guests search for destinations, where they can feel safe as in their own homes.

PHOTOS:

Photos: Damijan Simčič – Zoso

Leaflets: Brda Cherry to Every Home & Make Yourself Your Own Cherry Festival Make Yourself Your Own Cherry Festival