

Case Study

Hažić

Panoramic view of the campsite and the mobile houses (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

1. Introduction

Vinska kuća & kamp Hažić is an agrotourism farm located in the Međimurje County, in northern Croatia, next to the border with Slovenia.

It is a family business, run by a marriage, Radenko and Biserka Hažić, and their two daughters, Tatjana and Valentina. Covering an area of 6.5 ha., they produce wines and apples, and a range of products deriving from this fruit –juices, chips and vinegar–, which are also directly sold on the farm.

They also organise wine-tasting sessions for groups in their winery, as well as different kinds of sports and leisure activities for their guests. Furthermore, the farm offers accommodation too through a campsite, where people can stay in caravans and tents, and two mobile houses.

NAME OF THE BUSINESS

Vinska kuća & kamp Hažić

LOCATION

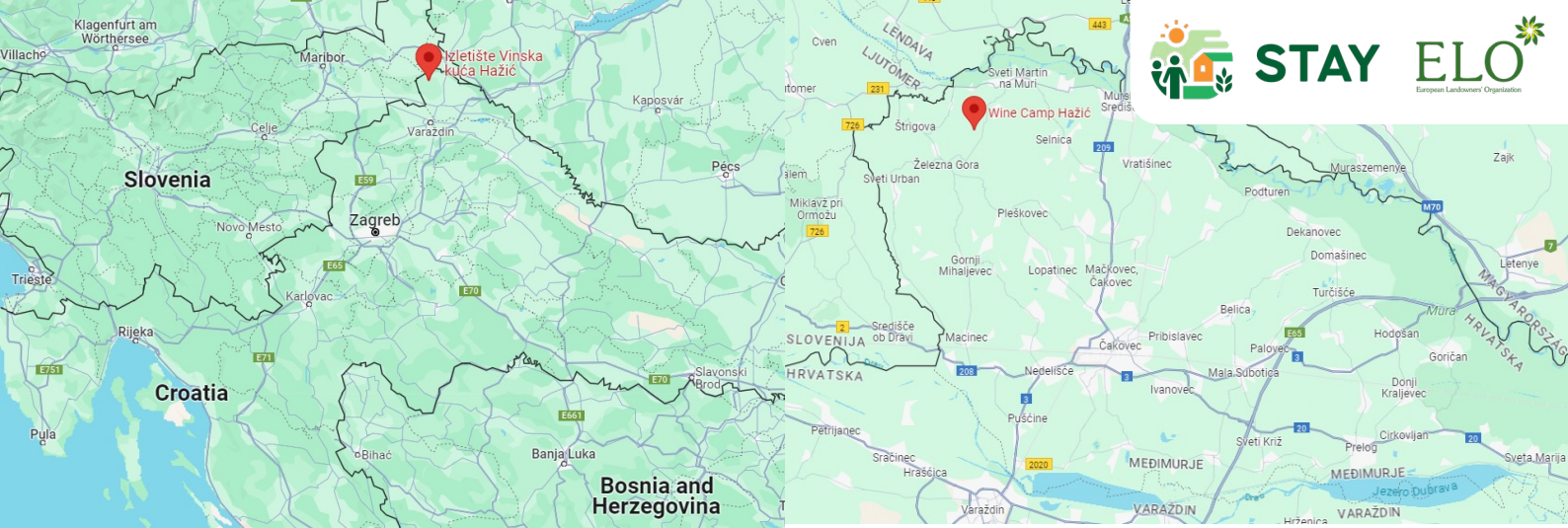
Sveti Martin na Muri, Međimurje County (Croatia)

2. About the agrotourism

The Međimurje region in Croatia borders Slovenia on the north and west and Hungary on the east. Its name comes from the two rivers that border the region: the Mura flows in the north, and the Drava in the south. The region, and especially the area where the farm is located, has small hills where vineyards and apple trees are planted, which form the basis of the agricultural production of the local farmers.

It is mainly a rural, lightly populated region. The tourism demand there comes especially from the urban areas of Croatia, and other countries in Europe. Tourists are generally in search of activities linked to the land, local products, running away from large conurbations and, ultimately, relaxing.

The farm is located 500 meters away from a thermal spa that constitutes one of the major sources of tourism in the area.



When did the agrotourism business start?

Three years ago, in 2020, they built the camp wine and the mobile houses, and, therefore, the farm could also begin offering accommodation.

Number of workers

All in all, the farm has around 15 workers, including seasonal labourers.

Some tourist data from the agrotourism

The farm rents fourteen camp pitches, where tourists can bring their own tents, campers or caravans. The farm can also host an additional eight people at the mobile homes, which have two beds each.

The origin of tourists varies according to the time of year, although, in general, the farm receives more international than national guests. During the high season, from May until October, most of the tourists are foreigners. This year, thanks to a promotion campaign in Slovenia, they received a considerable number of tourists from that country. Tourists often come from the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland.

Croatian tourists normally stay in close-by hotels or apartments, or in the wellness centre of the thermal spa, and they usually go to the Hažić farm to visit the winery for the tastings. Guests also have the opportunity to sample Croatian delicacies prepared by Mrs. Hažić, among which the most popular is the međimurska gibanica, a dessert made of puff pastry and four fillings: nuts, fresh cheese, poppy seeds and apples.

Some tourists arrive in organised groups, and among those who came this summer, several have already reserved their stay for next year. The average tourist is 45 years or older.



The mobile houses' bathroom (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

A bedroom in the mobile house with a double bed (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

The inside of the mobile house (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)



Two participants from the yearly vineyard trail.
(photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)



Tatjana picking apples from a tree at the vineyard
(photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

Guests can engage in farming activities, such as picking apples and grapes, or cutting the grass. The farm organises a wide variety of events for the tourists. The one that attracts the most participation is the monthly running activity. Divided into three different categories (5 km, 10 km, and 20 km), it is not a competition as all the group goes and comes back together. The participants run across the hills to the river Mura. Upon their return, they are received with homemade desserts, and they can also get some drinks.

The farm also organises a vineyard trail once a year, where partakers have to run up and down the vineyards five times. The fastest person gets an award consisting of some products produced on the farm and some prizes given by the sponsors, like a gift card to the thermal spa. There are several editions of this event. A version for children of this event is celebrated, in which kids must run up

and down only once. There is also a relay race in the vineyards: groups, composed of three runners each, compete against one another. Members of the team must pass each other a token, which is a crystal glass. At the end of the competition, a DJ entertains with music, and attendees can eat, drink and dance.

On weekends, they also provide a free bus service, a "hop on – hop off bus", that takes the guests to places of interest, like other wineries, museums, etc. There are two set routes (cultural and gastronomical) every weekend that tourists can choose from, and, if there aren't enough people to cover one route, guests are directly asked where they want to go among all the available options.

Lastly, they offer free advice on bike and walking routes through the surroundings to their customers.



Attendees to the vineyard trail, encouraging participants.
(photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)



The mobile houses' porch. (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

About commercialization

The farm's website included a booking system for guests to reserve their accommodation, but it was taken down due to its high cost. The mobile homes are commercialised on Booking.com. The campsite is advertised on different national and international websites and platforms, like Road Surfer, PitchUp, Campercontact, Pincamp, park4night, etc.

The local tourism association supported them by publishing advertisements about the region on Slovenian tourism portals. This is the reason why they have received more guests from Slovenia this year. Nonetheless, the results in terms of tourist numbers are remarkable only when campaigns are targeted at very specific audiences.

They also have two different profiles in Google Business, one for the winery and another one for the wine camp. The Hažić family is now considering creating a third one for the product shop, as they are shown as a sole business despite having different opening hours. Those are the profiles:

Winery: <http://tinyurl.com/4pys3smd>
Camping site: <http://tinyurl.com/3mmxrt6c>

The accommodation can also be booked through the farm's social media, instant messaging applications (WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger) and also by directly calling their phone number or sending them an email.



A couple of tourists relaxing outside of their caravan, at the campsite (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

About advertising

The Hažić farm has a complete website, available in Croatian, English and German, where they advertise the farm and the products and services they offer. A blog with the latest updates is also included on the website. The link is <https://opg-hazic.com/en/>.

The farm is also present on several social media platforms:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IzletisteVinskaKucaHazic>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/izletistevinskakuca/>
- TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@winecamphazic>

They also have printed materials. Firstly, a leaflet about the juices they produce, in English, that includes a map of where it is located so customers can easily find it. It is made from recycled paper. They also have another leaflet where they introduce the farm, the winery and some of the activities they provide (vineyard trail, hop on – hop off bus). This leaflet is available in Croatian and in English.

About starting up the business

The farm was opened by Mr. and Mrs. Hažić back in the 1990s, when they came back home after working for some years in Slovenia and started producing apples and wine. They also ventured into beekeeping, but finally had to give it up because it was too difficult for them to take on three different activities simultaneously. In 2016, they began producing juice too. Before that, in 2012, the farm started providing wine tastings for external guests.

The Hažić farm was one of the pioneers in engaging in agrotourism in the Međimurje region. As it is located near the thermal spa, the family saw a growing flow of tourists who could be interested in buying the products they produce. Starting in 2012, the farm launched a weekly wine-tasting session for the guests coming to the spa, that took place every Saturday. It was a collaborative program between the spa and the farm, by which the first one included the tasting among the services it offered to its visitors. The Hažić family also spotted a window of opportunity in the thriving demand for local and domestic products.



The wine house (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

In the last few years, new accommodations have been built around and close to the thermal spa, which brought new customers to the farm. The family had the idea of differentiating the farm by promoting not only the products they produce themselves, but also the natural environment that surrounds them and by offering a series of activities that are respectfully immersed in nature. That was when they decided to provide accommodation, first through the campsite and later by building mobile houses.

The business was developed step by step, segment by segment, following an analysis of the trends in the market and among the customers. It was almost quite a natural path for the sisters to join their parents, because Valentina studied Agriculture and Tatjana studied Tourism. Before opening the winery, Mr. and Mrs. Hažić asked their daughters whether they were willing to work in the family business, as otherwise they wouldn't have engaged in agrotourism.

One significant hurdle they encountered was the challenge of finding trained young individuals eager to work in rural settings. Consequently, they have begun a search for programs that can streamline their operations, aiming to enhance efficiency and productivity while reducing the workforce necessary for their activities in these rural areas.

For the expansion and enhancement of their agrotourism enterprise, the farm procured financial support from the European Union via the Croatian Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Rural Development. Additionally, they accessed supplementary funding from both national and regional sources, with the primary reliance initially placed on national funds owing to their provision of a higher percentage of cost coverage during the initial stages of development. The person responsible for finding and executing these funds was Valentina, who has since become a consultant who assists new farming and rural companies in looking for the best funding opportunities tailored to their needs.



The caravan parking (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

About managing an agrotourism business

Apart from the Hažić family (the parents, Tatjana and Valentina), the farm has some other part-time workers. A young student helps them with marketing, public relations and the management of the tourist side of the farm (wine house, camp and mobile houses). Another worker is tasked with assisting in the production and the cleaning of the premises. The farm also hires between eight and ten seasonal workers who are needed to harvest grapes and apples.

The family feels that running an agrotourism business, as a two-pronged one including the farm and the accommodation, is stressful. Nevertheless, because their business is still starting and growing, they realise the difference between seasons. During the low seasons, they are hardly ever fully booked, which allows them to focus on the farming activities. The campsite isn't available during winter; however, the mobile homes, typically reserved for weekends, remain accessible.

The winery is solely open at request, so the tasting sessions are scheduled beforehand. The shop is open from Monday to Friday, from 8 to 18, Saturdays from 10 to 19, and Sundays until 13.

When there are fewer tourists or no guests at all, Tatjana, who takes care of the agrotourism part of the business, can do other tasks, such as working the vineyards or delivering the juices they produce to bars and restaurants, or even to private individuals that live as far as Zagreb.

Tatjana estimates that around 80% of the family income comes from the primary production, that is, from the farming and processing activities. It includes the direct sales of the products. The missing 20% then comes from the agrotourist activity they develop. The farm produces yearly 20.000 bottles of wine.

The family is considering expanding the menu of meals offered not only to their guests, but also to guests coming from other accommodations. Their main premise is that they would buy products from regional producers, thus strengthening the cooperation between local businesses.

The plans for the near future include hiring a new person, a young boy who is set to replace Mr. and Mrs. Hažić, as they are growing older and are now thinking of retiring. They also want to take the wine house to a bigger scale by providing more tasting sessions. On top of all that, the family wishes to expand the range of products they offer in a move to surprise and attract new guests and potential customers. They would also like to participate in more programmes that would enable them to improve the energy efficiency of the farm.

In terms of accommodation facilities, the Hažić family is planning to build six new mobile houses, to a total of eight, in the next years. To continue this development, they intend to seek support from national funds, enabling an accelerated expansion of their business.



A mom and her daughter having fun in the playground, just in front of the mobile houses. (photo provided by Tatjana Hažić e Iris Buhin)

Advice for new entrepreneurs

“The most important advice that can be given to any person thinking of engaging in the agrotourism sector is to work, work, and work. The hard work will eventually give its fruits. Mr. Hažić has been working on the farm for more than thirty years, and he insists that newcomers need to leave their fears and doubts behind and be strong. Don't give up, because it's not easy and it requires a lot of energy, but you are the only person responsible for your own success”.



Still Tourism Around Yard



Co-funded by
the European Union

Project N. 2022-1-SIO1-KA220-VET-000087663

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.