

dutch focus

FUTURE-ORIENTED TRAVEL

DUTCH ENTREPRENEURS BALANCE DOING BUSINESS AND PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

It was more than a decade ago that two Dutchmen, Jeroen van Drunen and Lennard de Klerk fell in love with the undulating hills of the Cserehát region in northeastern Hungary. It was clear to the two entrepreneurs that the location was an ideal venue for what they had in mind: eco-friendly rural tourism with a touch of luxury.



The Irota EcoLodge opened its door to guests three years ago and Van Drunen tells Diplomacy&Trade that the venture has so far been successful. "Our specific kind of accommodation, eco-friendly yet luxurious, attracts guests to the Cserehát region who otherwise might have chosen a different travel destination. This gives us an opportunity to spread the word about this beautiful but lesser known area. Our activities have not gone unnoticed: we featured in numerous Hungarian publications and TV programs, which shows that there is a vivid interest in future-oriented travel in Hungary."

Family reunions, holidays

The EcoLodge, tucked away in the remote village of Irota next to the Hungarian-Slovak border, consists of three spacious villas decorated in three distinct styles: rustic, 1960s retro and sleek contemporary. Despite the secluded location, or perhaps because of it, guest numbers are on the rise. "This year, we

saw an even larger share of Hungarian reservations than before. Next to families and groups of friends, we have welcomed a growing number of mixed families, with one Hungarian partner and one foreign, who come to Hungary for family reunions and holidays. Hungarians living abroad like to spend their winter holidays here: instead of staying with relatives in sometimes cramped apartments, they prefer to book one or more of our houses and invite their Hungarian kin to Irota to celebrate Christmas or New Year together.



We realize this is a very complacent thing to say, but we are happy to see that our original business idea caught on. We sometimes have a good laugh about our initial understanding that our clientele would consist of foreign holiday makers alone, and even considered not having a Hungarian website at all. That would have been a crucial mistake!"

Call us idealists

"Un-businesslike as it may sound, we are not here for profit optimization," Van Drunen points out. Their objective is to show that tourism has a future without weighing on the environment and local communities. "Of course, we don't aim to lose money, we have to make a living as well, but we strongly feel that any expansion of a tourism project in a village of 50 people destroys exactly what people enjoy here. Moreover, our guests are not only happy with the extras we offer, but also with what they do



not find: a hundred other holiday makers right next door. Call us idealists (please do), but no, we are not looking to expand."

Van Drunen stresses that the days when the climate crisis was an abstract concept are clearly over. "You only need to look at the last two summers we had in Europe (drought, floods, heat waves, forest fires) and it is more than clear that matters have spun out of control. People realize that sacrifices need to be made. It is not enough to blame politicians for their less than ambitious attitude: after all, we elect them. The same goes for polluting industries: we buy their plastics. More than ever, we need to take a stance and accept the harsh reality that we will have to give up some, and later maybe many of the luxuries we have become so accustomed to. One example: we have decided to stop flying within Europe. This makes travel take longer and be more expensive. So be it." 