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Investing in companies with sustainable values is a strategic and forward-thinking choice. An increasing number of businesses are recognising the critical role that sustainable practices play in ensuring long-term success and making a positive impact on our collective future. As such, investing that follows the principles of sustainability has emerged as a prominent trend, offering investors a unique opportunity to achieve financial success while promoting environmental and social responsibility. Why is it wise to invest in companies that are well prepared for the future? Read on to find out.

Sustainability as a key performance indicator

Sustainability is becoming an indispensable indicator of business performance in today's competitive landscape. Companies that embrace sustainable practices – such as reducing their carbon footprint, utilising resources efficiently, prioritising employee welfare, and maintaining transparency and accountability – tend to exhibit greater stability, competitiveness, and long-term viability. These attributes enhance the potential for value growth within investment portfolios.

Resilience to market fluctuations

Businesses that adhere to sustainability principles are often more resilient to market fluctuations, as they are better equipped to navigate future challenges. This resilience can lead to increased value growth in investment portfolios. Furthermore, companies committed to sustainability tend to be more accountable and transparent, thereby mitigating legal and operational risks.

Capturing the sustainability investment trend

Interest in investing in companies that prioritise sustainability has surged in recent years, as more investors recognise the influential



PHOTO: Shutterstock

Invest in mutual funds that follow sustainability principles.

power of their capital. According to the ESG Attitudes Tracker (2022), a majority of private investors (53%) now consider environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors when making investment decisions.

Understanding ESG factors

ESG factors represent a comprehensive set of criteria used to evaluate organisations based on their environmental impact, social responsibility, and corporate governance practices.

Consistency and commitment to long-term goals

Much like in sports, investing in companies that adhere to sustainability principles requires consistency and a focus on well-defined long-

term objectives. By pursuing opportunities that align with our values and adjusting our strategies accordingly, we can achieve success in both sports and investing. To learn more about how Triglav Skladi selects companies for our mutual fund portfolios in accordance with our Responsible Investment Policy, please follow the link in the QR code.



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GORAN NOVKOVIĆ, EDITOR



Welcome to enterprising Slovenia

If you ask ChatGPT what it can tell you about Slovenian champions in sport and business, it will give you the following answer:

"Despite its small size (only two million inhabitants), Slovenia has many successful individuals and companies that have made a name for themselves on the international stage, both in sport and business."

A. Sport

Cycling is one of the disciplines where Slovenians have reached the very top on a global scale. Tadej Pogačar is a two-time winner of the Tour de France (2020, 2021) and this year's winner of the Giro d'Italia (2024), while Primož Roglič is a multiple winner of the Vuelta a España (2019, 2020, 2021) and winner of the Giro d'Italia (2023). Jan Oblak, the footballer, who plays as a goalkeeper for the Spanish club Atlético Madrid, is often named as one of the best goalkeepers in the world. And let's not forget Tina Maze, a former Alpine skier, who won two gold medals at the 2014 Sochi Olympics and four Crystal Globes in the 2012–2013 season, tallying a record number of World Cup points.

B. Business

Pipistrel, a light aircraft manufacturer, is a pioneer in the development of electric aircraft. Their aircraft have won numerous international awards and prizes for innovation and sustainable mobility. Outfit7, best known for its Talking Tom and Friends app, is one of the most successful mobile app developers in the world. In 2017, the company was sold for USD 1 billion to a Chinese investment consortium. Akrapovič is a manufacturer of high-performance exhaust systems for motorcycles and cars."

But these are just a few of the well-known names from Slovenian sport and business who have made it to the top of the world. While Slovenia has established itself as a country of top performers in the three decades since its independence, in recent years certain names have shined especially brightly on the world stage.

In sport, the cyclists Tadej Pogačar and Primož Roglič, basketball player Luka Dončić, the national basketball, handball and volleyball teams and many others have proved that even small countries and their athletes can compete globally in the most competitive sports.

On the other hand, two strong groups of firms emerged on the Slovenian business scene after the 2008 economic crisis. The first includes relatively small scale and yet global players. The second consists of large and powerful Slovenian exporters, both locally owned and those operating under the ownership of strong global brands, such as Novartis, Sandoz, Hisense, Bosch, and others.

Why? Because the entrepreneurial vision of the future lies in the knowledge of the Slovenian population, and this attracts major foreign investors to the country. This knowledge is concentrated in large Slovenian exporters and niche development companies.

Before you is a magazine that carefully brings together Slovenia's greatest sporting and business champions in honour of such a major sporting event as this year's Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Welcome to enterprising Slovenia, which unites all industrious, ambitious, inspiring, talented, innovative athletes, entrepreneurs, scientists, artists and other creative individuals.

Slovenian sport & business champions

Special edition of Podjetna Slovenija (Enterprising Slovenia) magazine to mark the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris

PODJETNA
SLOVENIJA

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Slovenian Sport & Business Champions magazine was published to mark the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. While the Olympic Games were in progress, it occupied a special place at Slovenia House in the Parc de la Villette, where it was given to business guests and other guests. Copies will continue to be available until the end of 2024 at numerous Slovenian diplomatic and consular representations around the world.

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When the sky is the limit!



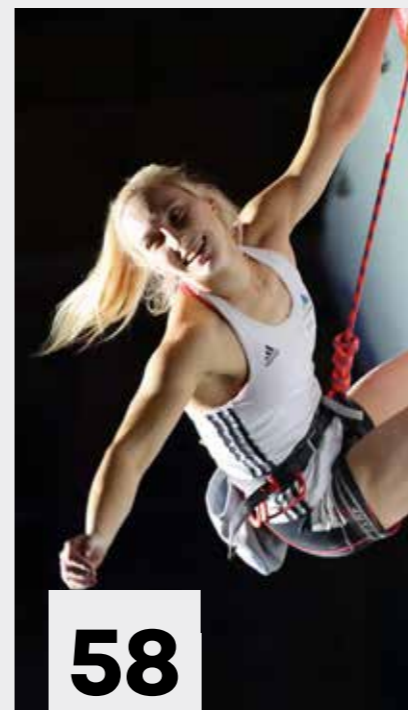
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The Elrad Group, which develops and manufactures electronic assemblies and controls, supplies its products to established industrial multinationals, and has a strong presence in the fields of green energy, e-mobility and other areas where the use of electronics is on the rise.



Elrad International started as a small company in 1996 in Gornja Radgona. As its sales grew, it gradually developed into the Elrad Group, which today has production units in Slovenia, Serbia (since 2004), China (since 2007), Mexico (since 2019) and the Philippines (since 2021), enabling it to supply its customers with products flexibly and with favourable delivery times, wherever they are.

The wider Elrad Group includes partner companies that complement its comprehensive offering through vertical integration. These include Elrad Wire Systems, which produces cable sets and harnesses, and Dafra, which specialises in contact technology.

In 2023, the Elrad Group achieved sales revenues of EUR 190 million. With its partner companies, Elrad employs around 2,000 people, of which 1,600 are in the electronic assemblies manufacturing group. The largest company in the group, Elrad Electronics Gornja Radgona, currently employs nearly 500 people. In 2023, it generated sales revenues of EUR 149 million.

Complete solutions

Elrad offers its customers and partners, in cooperation with partner companies, complete solutions for the sales, development and production of electronic assemblies and controls – from initial development to final electronics production, including mechanics. It also offers “off the shelf” products developed in-

house that are immediately available on the market.

“Our product range includes switches developed in-house for the hand tools segment. A characteristic feature of our electronics development is the rapid launch of products, and thus the short time to market. We pride ourselves on delivering and consistently maintaining the highest quality of our products, as well as excellence and expertise in customer support in technical sales, development and industrialisation of electronics. Our growth is based on providing exemplary support to existing customers, and thus excellent customer service,” a spokesperson for the company emphasises.

Supplier to established companies

The largest segment is electronics for hand tools, supplied to customers such as Hilti, Bosch PT, Metabo, Gesipa, and Fromm, among others. The second most important segment is garden tools, which includes electronics for Husqvarna robotic lawnmowers and for the garden tools and equipment produced by firms such as Stihl and Bosch. Other sales segments include electronics for small household appliances (e.g., BSH), white goods (Miele, Liebherr, Gorenje), the automotive industry, e.g. electronics for Audi (Forvia Hella) and Mercedes (Gruner), manufacturing industry (Rexroth) and many other fields. “We are a preferred and strategic supplier to many of these custom-



ers,” explains a spokesperson for the company based in Gornja Radgona.

Expanding into new areas

Elrad is increasingly establishing itself in the green energy sector, where it develops and manufactures electronics for stationary or portable Energy Storage Systems (ESS) and electronics for electric vehicle charging stations. It's also expanding its presence in other sectors where the use of electronics is on the rise (medical devices, leisure products, special industries, etc.).

As the spokesperson says of Elrad's plans: “We will continue to strengthen in-house development, we are actively focusing on automation, robotisation and digitisation of our business, and we are continuously improving our processes towards lean manufacturing and lean administration, while enhancing operations such as global procurement.”



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Pioneering role in the development of electric planes and mobility solutions



Strong commitment of Slovenian companies to the environmental aspect of ESG



Locally developed technologies for a green, clean and healthy world

Panthera, a lightweight, all-composite, highly efficient four-seat aircraft by Pipistrel

Slovenia's *golden* cycling generation

- How did Primož Roglič and Tadej Pogačar become the best known Slovenian cyclists and start scoring top results in international races?
- What lies behind the incredible development of Slovenian cycling and how has hard work led to extraordinary results?
- Who else is in Slovenia's incredibly strong cycling team?

TOMI ŠUJDOVIČ / PHOTO: ALEŠ FEVŽER

Stunning successes in major international competitions are the reason why sports stars are always among Slovenia's highest-profile "exports". Among them are the country's cyclists, who in recent years have been astonishing cycling fans at home and abroad. The two biggest names are Primož Roglič, now 34 years old, and Tadej Pogačar, nine years younger. They have become stars and globally recognised names in cycling, cheered on by fans both in Slovenia and around the world.

Roglič: swapped his skis for a bike

Primož Roglič famously switched to cycling from winter sports, specifically from ski jumping. As a child, he started off playing football. Then he decided to swap the ball for a pair of skis. In 2006 he won a silver medal in the men's team ski jumping event at the Nordic Junior World Ski Championships in Kranj, before going on to win gold in the same event a year later at the 2007 Nordic Junior World Ski Championships, held in Planica (Slovenia) and Tarvisio (Italy).



Slovenia's Olympic gold medal winning cycling ace from Tokyo, Primož Roglič, will be in Paris to cheer on four of the Slovenian team's trump cards. At this year's Olympic Games, Tadej Pogačar, currently the biggest star in world cycling, will have the support of three top-class colleagues from Slovenian cycling's next wave: Matej Mohorič, Luka Mezgec and Jan Tratnik.

He retired from ski jumping in 2012. At the age of 22 he switched to cycling and showed, in this "second career", what a supreme athlete he is. His professional cycling debut came with the Radenska cycling team, after which he continued his career with Adria Mobil.

His debut in cycling's top tier (the UCI World Tour) came in 2016, when he joined the Dutch team LottoNL-Jumbo (later renamed Jumbo-Visma). He continued to compete with the "wasps" (after their team colours) until last year. He now races with the German team Bora-Hansgrohe. In 2019, with his general classification victory in the Vuelta a España, Roglič made history as the first Slovene to win a Grand Tour competition.

Pogačar: world cycling's number 1

As a child, Tadej Pogačar also started out playing football. He switched to cycling fol-

lowing in the footsteps of his older brother, who had begun cycling with the Rog cycling club in Ljubljana. He fell in love with this two-wheeled sport and the rest is history.

He made rapid progress and, since his talent was evident, top teams from the UCI World Tour soon began taking an interest in him. The fortunate team that eventually secured his signature was UAE Team Emirates. He began riding for them in 2019, the year that marked the start of his professional career. His meteoric rise began a year later.

In the year 2020, at the age of 21, he won the Tour de France, the world's most prestigious cycling race. Although he has been the number one ranked cyclist in the world for a number of years now, he has never forgotten his beginnings with his club in Ljubljana. This is what led him to establish his own Pogi Team section within the

Rog cycling club. In this way he helps promising young cyclists and ensures that there will be no shortage of talented successors in the future.

A strong Slovenian team with an abundance of elite cyclists

This year in Paris, Roglič will be cheering on the up-and-coming members of the nation's cycling team. A group A group of excellent cyclists will be cycling alongside Pogačar. Matej Mohorič, Jan Tratnik and Luka Mezgec. It is truly inspiring to see how Slovenia's best cyclists grow from year to year and build on their past achievements.

If 2023 was already outstanding in terms of results, the current year promises to be even better, difficult though that may be to believe. A few years ago we were happy if a Slovenian cyclist snatched a stage victory in one of the big races. But then "Pogi", "Rogla" and company started to raise the bar of success.

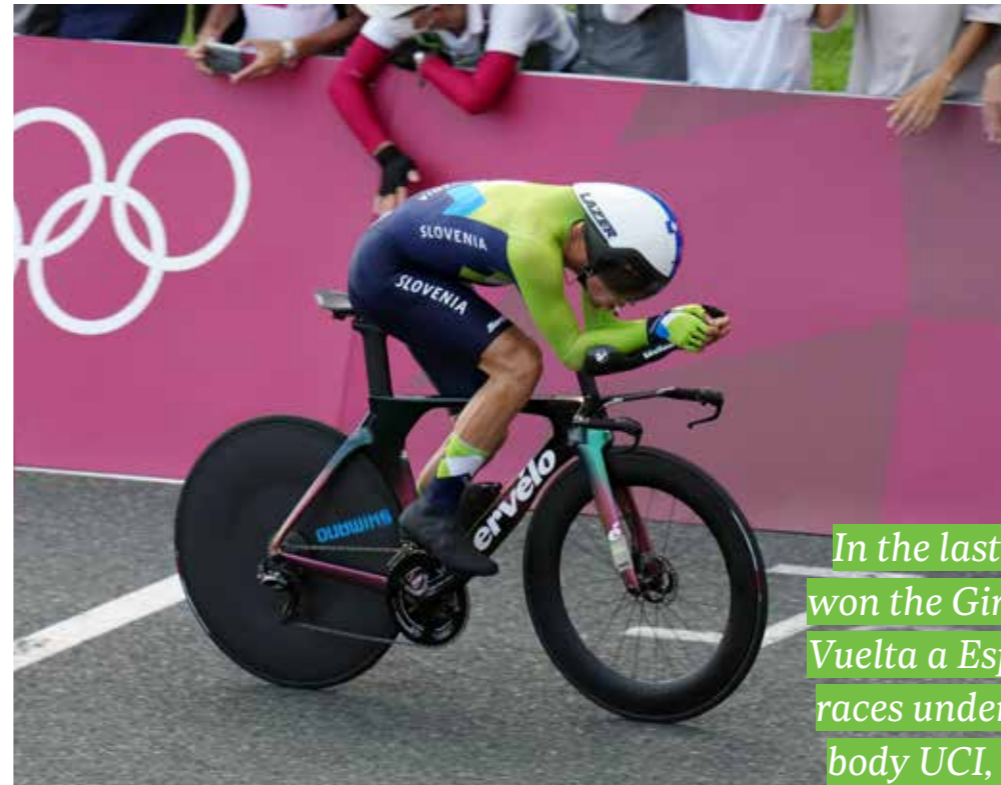
In the last five years, Roglič and Pogačar have won the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France and the Vuelta a España, in other words the three biggest races under the aegis of cycling world governing body UCI, to mention only the most significant of cycling's multi-week events.

Two medals from Tokyo 2020 and good prospects for Paris 2024

The level of competitiveness in Slovenia's cycling team is truly extraordinary. Team selector Uroš Murn was faced with the pleasant dilemma of having to choose a road race team for the Olympic Games in Paris. Slovenia's four riders will attempt to improve on the results achieved at the last Games in Tokyo.

The Olympics are not only one of the sporting highlights of the year, for numerous competitors they also represent the symbolic end of a lengthy cycle of preparation, training and sacrifice. This year, unusually, the Games arrive after an interval of not four years but three, since the last Summer Olympics in Tokyo were actually held in the summer of 2021, despite being officially branded as Tokyo 2020. The reason for the discrepancy, of course, being that the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside down.

The last Summer Games were something of an anomaly, not least because they took place without spectators in front of empty stands – a circumstance that detracted somewhat from the spectacle. What-



In the last five years, Roglič and Pogačar have won the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France and the Vuelta a España, in other words the three biggest races under the aegis of cycling world governing body UCI, to mention only the most significant of cycling's multi-week events.

Slovenia among the big 5

The rule at this year's Olympic Games is that the five highest-ranked teams in the international classification (UCI) receive a full quota and can thus field four riders. Apart from Slovenia, this means Belgium, Denmark, Great Britain and France. Only 90 cyclists from all over the world will start the Paris 2024 road race, but Slovenia is among the five teams with the maximum number of riders participating in the event, while in the time trial Slovenia's men's team will field one competitor.



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the way for the generations that followed them. The first cycling club in Ljubljana (the Slovenian Bicyclists' Club) was founded way back in 1887, followed in 1895 by the Slovenian Cyclists' Union.

After the First World War, cycling became one of the most widely practised sports in the country, with at least 22 cycling clubs operating in Slovenia by 1930. Cycling thus has deep roots in Slovenia, although it is only in the last few years that this persevering work has started to bring remarkable results at the highest level. One could say that the turning point came with the outstanding achievements of Slovenia's cyclists in 2023, which confirmed that Slovenia is now a superpower in the cycling world.

In the first few years following Slovenia's independence, there were perhaps two or three Slovenian cyclists riding in the highest category. This number has grown in recent years and there are currently around ten riders at this level. The fact that young riders in the under-23 category at Slovenia's cycling clubs are already waiting in the wings for their chance to shine is an encouraging sign.

Slovenia among the medal favourites

As a result of their successes in major international races – be they one-day events or three-week grand tours – Slovenia's cyclists are among the wider group of medal favourites at the Olympic Games in Paris. This might be a burden or an additional motivation.

Winning a medal is no easy task, and the expectations of the Slovenian and global public are certainly high, but there is no question that Slovenia's riders are used to the pressure. After proving themselves day after day in prestigious international events, against elite competition, they have gained experience and an awareness of what they're capable of. Pogačar and his colleagues, all of them uncompromising fighters, will, of course, take the starring roles. Their hunger for success is limitless.

We can therefore hope that, after the trials of Paris, Slovenia's national anthem will resound at the medal ceremony at this year's Summer Olympic Games. The two key dates for cycling are 27 July and 3 August. Successes such as victories at the world's biggest cycling races and (for the moment) two Olympic cycling medals are the proof that Slovenia has a bright future in the sport. It is clear that Slovenia's cyclists have still not said the last word. >>

Winning a medal is no easy task, and the expectations of the Slovenian and global public are certainly high, but there is no question that Slovenia's riders are used to the pressure. Matej Mohorič among them.

It is clear that the Slovenian school of cycling has the experience and approach to ensure that young riders who join the ranks of the professionals are immediately able to pull their weight and already know exactly what is expected of them. Another of the reasons for the success of Slovenian cycling is perhaps the fact that it doesn't take much money to get started. Give a young cyclist a bike, some clubs to join and somewhere to train (i.e. roads), and that is more than enough.

It is also proverbially the case that cyclists need a full measure of perseverance and stubbornness, since cycling – like swimming or athletics – can be a highly tiring process, with its endless training. But sports that require hard work – like turning pedals – are perfect for the Slovenian character.



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Olympians in the world of business

- Which Slovenian cycling Olympian is one of the biggest entrepreneurs in Slovenia?
- Which Olympic whitewater K-1 medallist is now in the cycling business?
- What is the next generation of Slovenian cyclists like?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ

The life paths of two Slovenian Olympians, who are now successful entrepreneurs, are entwined with cycling. But neither was a cyclist in their sporting careers.

Rok Drašler, who competed for Slovenia as a mountain biker at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, is today, together with his family, the owner of one of the largest and most successful Slovenian companies owned by entrepreneurs.

MDM is a manufacturing and service company, dealing in the wholesale and retail of stainless steel and aluminium products or semi-finished products. According to the latest data of the Podjetna Slovenija magazine, it is already among the 600 largest companies in the country and ranks 13th among entrepreneur-owned businesses.

Sport, Drašler points out, has been a major contributor to his success: "In sport I learned a lot of smart, useful things and, above all, to be aware of others. I learned several foreign languages, strict discipline and – very importantly – decision-making. In sport, you always have to be organised, orderly and prepared.



Imagine how tiring it can be for the wearer of the leader's jersey in a 3-week race, when at any moment they could be threatened by an attack from their rivals. Tadej Pogačar was a good example of this at the recent Giro d'Italia. He was not threatened because he was in such great shape. It's the same in business, although everything happens much more slowly, more deliberately," says Rok Drašler.

Rok Drašler: "Slovenia is a cycling country. The new generation is very promising."

Vehovar makes bike saddles, shoes, even bicycles...

Andraž Vehovar won a silver medal in Atlanta in 1996. But not in cycling, in whitewater kayaking. Today, he is involved in cycling in a small but niche development company, Berk-Vehovar kompoziti, the majority of which he owns.



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“Even after my professional sporting career, I’m still involved in sports. I did triathlons for a while and then I got into cycling. It was on the bike that I met Jure Berk, the co-owner of our company.”

Ten years ago, after many shared kilometres and hours of frustration on inadequate bike saddles, they started producing them themselves. Over the years, the company expanded its product range to include cycling shoes and even complete bicycles.

... while Drašler enjoys cycling

While the Olympic silver medallist Andraž Vehovar is building bicycles, Rok Drašler likes to get back on his bike even after many years: “It’s because of the good company of friends, the new advanced bicycle technology, and my family and colleagues, because we all support the sport. Slovenia is blessed with a beautiful landscape. With the wind in your hair, it really gives you a feeling of timelessness. Team rides take you in a vacuum, in a group, almost effortlessly.”

Creating the lightest cycling shoes with the help of cycling aces

Naturally, both Vehovar and Drašler follow the successes of Slovenian cyclists closely. Vehovar has also been in business contact with them. Tadej Pogačar, for example, rode on bike saddles produced by Berk-Vehovar kompoziti and also used their cycling shoes for many years, until he turned professional. And Matej Mohorič was part of the inner circle of the team that for the last few years worked on the development project of creating the world’s lightest cycling shoes.

“The pool of Slovenian cycling talent is so large that several people, not just Tadej Pogačar, could succeed at the Olympics. In kayaking and canoeing, Slovenian athletes are traditionally competing for the highest rankings. I have no doubt that the same will be true in Paris and that at least one of them will come back with a medal around their neck,” says Andraž Vehovar, who, of course, looks back fondly on his days as a competitor.



Photo: Bor Dobrin

Andraž Vehovar: “The pool of Slovenian cycling talent is so large that several people, not just Tadej Pogačar, could succeed at the Olympics.”



Photo: Alen Milavec

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Foto: Zmudašič

This year we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of ebm-papst Slovenija. Since 2001, we have been owned by the German group ebm-papst, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of fans for air technologies and heating technologies. The product range of ebm-papst Slovenija includes various fans of heat pump and household appliances for world-renowned companies. We aim to inspire our customers with the next generation of digital fans integrated with

sustainable solutions. Our products and services are certified with ISO 9001, ISO 14001, the Family Friendly Enterprise Certificate and the Socially Responsible Employer Certificate. We have been investing in innovation and the professional development of our employees. We are closely involved in the local community through various donations and sponsorships and are one of the largest employers in the Notranjska region.



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“We are a country of the greatest sports fans”

“We have a leading man in one of the best cycling teams, the best cyclist in the world and many other riders at the very top. Yes, we’re definitely a cycling superpower. But I am also impressed by the fact that we have great top athletes in team sports and are without doubt the country with the greatest sports fans in the world.” Rok Drašler is looking forward to the Olympic Games and explains why Slovenia is so strong in cycling:

“In Slovenia, cyclists start their journey in local clubs. These work hard to give them the chance to progress. A good example is Tadej Pogačar, who was a member of KD Rog all his youth until he transferred directly to the UAE in 2018.

Slovenia is a cycling country. The new generation is very promising. Now that we are well connected with the professional teams, it is much easier for the

competent bodies to recognise talent here. Žak Eržen, who was among the world’s top juniors for several years, has already made the transition to the pros.”

And what does Paris have in store for us, in Drašler’s opinion? What does he predict for Slovenian athletes? “Ugh... That’s impossible to predict. Did anyone believe that Primož Roglič would win a gold medal in Tokyo, even though we all wanted it for him so much?

Let’s wait and see, because we have many top athletes, in many disciplines, both men and women. I look forward to cheering them on!” >>

Slovenia's export champions: innovative, green, entrepreneurial

- Who are Slovenia's export champions?
- How come Slovenia no longer catches a cold when Germany sneezes?



Photo: Adria Mobil archive

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ

I have been following the Slovenian economy for more than 30 years and I can confirm without a doubt that it has never been stronger. As recently as a decade ago, two things were true:

- if Germany sneezed, Slovenia would catch a cold,
- and Slovenia could catch a cold even if Germany didn't sneeze at all.

However, over the past few years Slovenia has been successfully weathering the challenges faced by its strongest economic partner, Germany. This is mainly thanks to our export champions. Why?

There are several reasons. The first is the diversification of Slovenian exports. Slovenian exports are still very much linked to Germany, but much less so than those of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

This is reflected in the fact that strong brands from all over the world incorporate products or services developed by Slovenian companies: Airbus, Audi, Alstom, Bayer, Bombardier, Bosch, Canon, Danfoss, Ducati, Electrolux, ESA, General Electric, Heineken, Honda, Lactalis, Mercedes Benz, NASA, Novartis, Pfizer, Philips, Renault, Samsung, Sandoz, Siemens, U.S. Steel, Volkswagen, Würth... This is just a partial list of the global brands we could name.



Photo: Kolektor archive

Strong innovative exporters + Slovenian Mittelstand

The second answer is found among Slovenia's export leaders, where top B2B export companies reign supreme alongside energy companies. These have significantly increased their development and innovation investments in recent years. In turn, they have been joined by entrepreneurs who were still tradesmen in the 1990s. Many of them were just starting out in a garage or as hobbyists, and some had not even appeared on the business map.



Photo: Gorenje archive

The magazine Podjetna Slovenija found in February this year that almost a third of the 600 largest Slovenian companies are now owned by entrepreneurs. And so Slovenia finally has a strong Mittelstand, which translates into an economy that is significantly more resilient to crises. Meanwhile, large traditional exporters have gained a new innovative impetus.

Owing to Slovenia's strong industrial tradition, most of them originate from industry. At the top are two manufacturers of household appliances: Gorenje, now owned by the Chinese Hisense, and BSH Nazarje, today owned by the German company Bosch. In terms of technology, pharmaceutical companies are even stronger: Lek, now owned by Sandoz, and Krka, which is listed on the stock exchange. Following the break-up of Sandoz and Novartis, which acquired Lek a few years ago, Novartis is also very active in terms of investing in Slovenia.

All of these export leaders have traditionally topped the rankings of the largest Slovenian companies and exporters. However, in recent years they have experienced a renaissance.

Figures on the growth of companies' exports over the last 5 years show that Gorenje's exports have almost doubled. Investments by Hisense have revived the Velenje company. Last year, Hisense Europe launched a EUR 2.1 million innovation centre in Velenje, which brings together professionals from different disciplines for development purposes, thus demonstrating that Chinese investors continue to develop new plans there.

The Swiss have recognised Slovenia as a haven of innovation and human resources

The fact that Slovenia's human resource potential is the key to even more investment has been proven in recent years by Swiss pharmaceutical investors.

Lek, a Sandoz company, is building a new EUR 300 million centre for the production of its biological drugs in Lendava in north-eastern Slovenia. As Lek's CEO Robert Ljoljo has pointed out, this is the largest direct foreign investment in the country. More than half of the 300 or so new jobs will be university-level positions.

But that's not all. In Ljubljana, a EUR 100 million state-of-the-art centre for the development of biological drugs will be completed by 2026. It will employ 200 scientists. Meanwhile, Novartis is making a EUR 200 million investment in the manufacture of aseptic products in Ljubljana. The company is also building a BioCampus for advanced biotechnology at its site in Mengeš. The main reason why the Swiss are investing so heavily in Slovenia is the high quality of the human resources.

Krka in Novo Mesto is also keeping busy. One of Europe's leading independent generics manufacturers, with annual product and service sales of more than EUR 1.8 billion, is increasing its market share through innovative generics, investments and expansion into new markets. The Novo Mesto company will invest more than EUR 160 million in a chemistry and analytical centre and a new production facility for active pharmaceutical ingredients in Krško in south-eastern Slovenia.

The fact that Slovenia's human resource potential is the key to even more investment has been proven in recent years by Swiss pharmaceutical investors.

Mobility industry leaders partnering with global brands

While pharmaceutical companies are mainly linked to Swiss partners, the mobility industry has strong links with Germany and France, where this year's Olympic Games are being held. Yet a closer look reveals that the Slovenian mobility industry is deeply embedded in the global mobility industry as a whole.

The south-east of Slovenia is a manufacturing hub for passenger cars and holiday vehicles. It is closely linked to France, as Revoz has long been owned by Renault. Adria Mobil, which manufactures holiday vehicles and other leisure products, became part of the French company Trigano a few years ago.

As many as 800 new jobs are expected to be created at Revoz, as Renault has plans to manufacture the new electric Twingo in Novo Mesto. This is planned for 2026, and according to media reports the car is estimated to cost around EUR 20,000.

Meanwhile, Adria Mobil is again expecting to produce more than 15,000 vehicles this year, thus maintaining one of the strongest market shares in the European caravanning market which reaches up to 7%. Motorhomes are also produced in the north-east of Slovenia under the Carthago brand.

The true sports champion of the mobility industry is Akrapovič, a maker of world-renowned exhaust systems. This well-known Slovenian company's products are used in many global car and motorcycle brands such as Lamborghini, Bentley, Porsche, Ducati, Honda and others.

These are just some of the brands that are Akrapovič's partners. The company's success is due to the exhaust systems developed by Igor Akrapovič. The most recent news on this front concerns Ferrari, which has partnered with Akrapovič in the field of



Photo: TAB archive



Photo: Lek Sandoz archive

motor racing. The Italian sports car manufacturer has fitted its race car with the Slovenian exhaust system for the prestigious Le Mans race.

Green role models: a gigafactory for battery storage systems

Much of Slovenia's automotive development and supply industry is owned domestically. Many companies are strong in their niches, as is evident from the ranking of the fastest growing exporters. One of the domestic niche companies that stand out is Hidria from Idrija, which focuses on laminar solutions for electric motors and hence on the electrification of mobility.

Kolektor from Idrija, which has for years supported automotive factories around the world with its comprehensive automotive solutions, is similarly responding to megatrends in vehicle electrification. The company is well known for its electric motor commutators. In the field of electronics and drives, they focus on two areas: special sensors and niche drives. This group is also strong in other sectors.

If we add Goodyear Slovenia, Mahle Electric Drives Slovenia, Hello Saturnus Slovenia, Odelo Slovenia and many other foreign-owned mobility companies, it is clear that there is hardly a car brand in the world without at least one part made in Slovenia.

In the north of Slovenia, a strong exporter is Tab from Mežica, which has recently made significant investments in the production of lithium-ion batteries. A new factory for battery storage systems will be opened this year in Prevalje near Mežica. They aim to contribute to Europe's green transition by significantly increasing production. According to Tab, this

will be the first gigafactory for the production of battery energy storage systems in Slovenia.

A rhapsody of industries and owners

Other traditional Slovenian export leaders are in the sectors of metallurgy (SIJ, Talum, Cinkarna), metals (Impol 2000, Unior), electricity (Iskra, Elrad International, Cablex, Domel, Eti), chemicals (Helios, Aquafil slo), foodstuffs (Perutnina Ptuj), paper (MM Količev), logistics (Luka Koper), and construction (Knauf Insulation, Trimo), as well as various other industries.

Slovenia is therefore seeing a veritable rhapsody of export champions, which is also reflected in the variety of ownership models: from businesses owned by entrepreneurs, to employee-owned and state-owned firms, in addition to foreign-owned companies. Regardless of their ownership, they are all among the major suppliers of world-renowned brands.

Slovenia may be small, but judging by its export champions, it's a global player. >>

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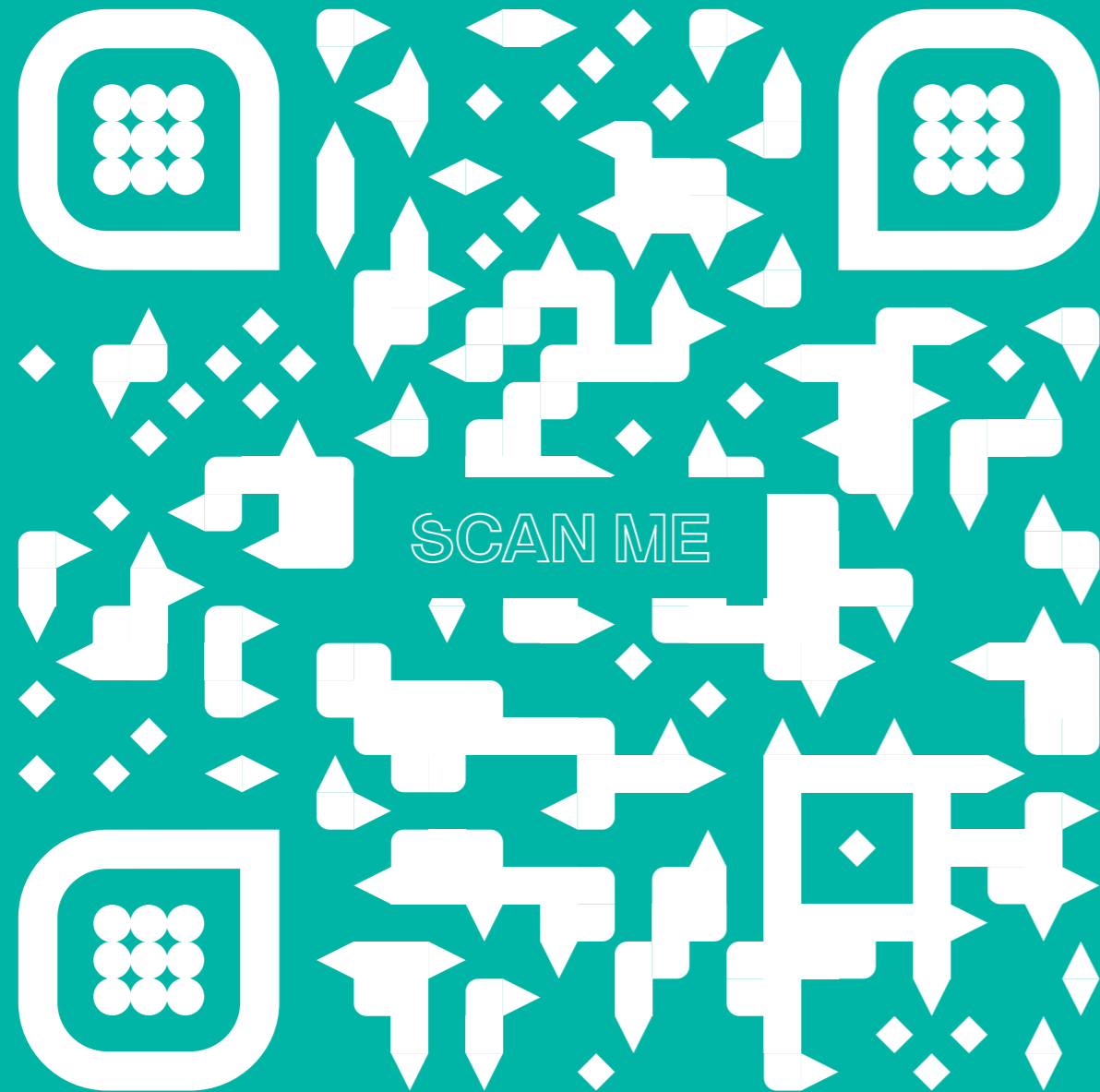
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TOP SLOVENIAN EXPORTERS*

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)	Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)
1	Petrol Group	5,438	36	Palfinger	199
2	HSE Group	3,509	37	Carthago	199
3	Belektron	3,150	38	Cablex Group	198
4	GEN Group	3,086	39	Odelo Slovenija	195
5	Gorenje gospodinski aparati	2,106	40	Slovenske železnice Group	190
6	Lek Group	1,875	41	Domel	183
7	Krka Group	1,614	42	Akrapovič Group	182
8	Dilon Group (SIJ**)	1,118	43	LES-MMS Group (Lesnina**)	179
9	Impol Group	1,067	44	Knaufl Insulation	173
10	Revoz	917	45	ETI Group	172
11	Geoplin Group	796	46	Rastoder Group	171
12	Interenergo	771	47	Trimo Group	171
13	Adria Mobil	572	48	Avto Aktiv Intermercatus Group	166
14	Kolektor Group	568	49	Titus Group (Lama*)	165
15	CT Management Group	546	50	Cimos Group	164
16	BSH Hišni aparati	460	51	ADK	162
17	Helios Group	412	52	I.P.S. Group	161
18	TAB Group	399	53	Plasta Group	158
19	Mahle Electric Drives Slovenija	395	54	Calcit Group	158
20	Talum Group	370	55	TPV Group	156
21	LTH Castings	362	56	Toyota Adria Group	156
22	Hidria Group	362	57	Iskraemeco Group	149
23	Mol & Ina	355	58	Danfoss Trata	148
24	Perutnina Ptuj Group	325	59	Don Don Group	140
25	Aquafilso	253	60	Pošta Slovenije Group	139
26	Unior Group	244	61	Kovintrade Group	136
27	MM Količevo	243	62	Štore Steel	136
28	GA Adriatic	239	63	Atlantic Droga Kolinska	135
29	Goodyear Slovenija	236	64	Dinos	131
30	Valiant	235	65	Bayer	126
31	Hella Saturnus Slovenija	233	66	Odpad	125
32	Elrad International Group	216	67	Contitech Slovenija Group	124
33	Iskra Group	212	68	Interblock Group	122
34	Luka Koper Group	211	69	Intereuropa Group	122
35	Cinkarna	208	70	Bravophone Adria	117

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)	Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)
71	Elena Group	117	85	Incom	95
72	ebm-papst Slovenija	113	86	TKK	94
73	Eles Group	111	87	Preskok	93
74	G4 Group	108	88	Ledinek Engineering	92
75	Tastepoint Group (Etol**)	108	89	MSIN Group	92
76	Arcont Group	106	90	Intersport ISI Group	92
77	Fotona	106	91	Novem Car Interior Design	92
78	GKN Driveline Slovenija	105	92	Nuklearna elektrarna Krško	92
79	Riko	104	93	Inotherm	90
80	Filc	103	94	HS Plus	90
81	Paloma	102	95	Ljubljanske mlekarne	89
82	Papirus Group (Goričane**)	101	96	Bisol Group	88
83	DP Jub Group	99	97	Iskra Mehanizmi Holding Group	84
84	Steklarna Hrastnik Group	97	98	Trelleborg Slovenija	83

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)	Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)
99	Medis Group	82	112	Telekom Group	73
100	Continental Adria pnevmatike	82	113	Farmtech	69
101	Silkem Plus Group	82	114	Cargox	67
102	Starkom	79	115	Boxline UCL	66
103	Siliko	79	116	VCAG Group	65
104	Papirnica Vevče	79	117	Cetis Group	63
105	Seven Refractories	77	118	Geberit proizvodnja	63
106	Weiler Abrasives Group	76	119	Sogefi Filtration	62
107	Lesonit	75	120	Raycap	62
108	Alpos metalurgija	75	121	Isokon	62
109	Meltal - Rado Snežič Group	75	122	MDM Group	62
110	Akton telekomunikacijski inženiring	74	123	TPG Express	61
111	Dewesoft Group	74	124	Spinnaker NT Group	60
			125	Boxmark Leather	60

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Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)	Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2022 (in € millions)
126	Perspektiva Group	59	166	Kontron	44
127	Bosch Rexroth	58	167	Pišek - Vitli Krpan	43
128	Intersocks	58	168	Polycom	43
129	Juteks	58	169	Poclain Hydraulics	42
130	Emil Frey Group	58	170	Adrial	42
131	Žibert Laminati Group	57	171	Mars Overseas Holding	42
132	TBP Group	57	172	Ecolab	42
133	Brinox Group	57	173	Willy Stadler	41
134	KLS Group	56	174	Uvecto	41
135	Kovis	56	175	Avto Triglav	41
136	Pirnar	55	176	SIP Group	41
137	Fenolit	55	177	Surovina	41
138	Tajfun Group	53	178	Maksim Group	40
139	Salonit Group	53	179	Baumuller Dravinja	40
140	Melamin Group	53	180	Plastika Skaza	39
141	Pivovarna Laško Union	53	181	PJU oglaševanje	39
142	Livar	53	182	Tovarna kemičnih izdelkov	39
143	Simpos	53	183	Atotech Slovenija	39
144	GMT Group	51	184	Metrel DUS Group	39
145	MM TEH Group (GH Holding**)	50	185	Steklarna Rogaška	39
146	Sibo Group	50	186	Eurofest	38
147	Rondal	49	187	Grammer Automotive Slovenija	38
148	Belimed pomivalni sistemi	49	188	Dani AFC	38
149	Astellas Pharma	48	189	Yaskawa Europe Robotics	38
150	ITW Appliance Components	47	190	Alpina Group	38
151	REM	47	191	Stora Enso Wood Products	38
152	Unitimber	47	192	Mariborska livarna Maribor	38
153	Cargo-Partner	47	193	Kolpa Group	38
154	KJK Investicije 5 Group	46	194	Albaugh	37
155	Kovinoplastika Lož Group	46	195	Niko	37
156	Herz	46	196	Tomplast	37
157	Sensilab	45	197	Isosport investicije Group	37
158	Metropolitana (GG Bled**)	45	198	Adria Tehnika	37
159	Trelleborg Wheel Systems Moto	45	199	RLS Merilna tehnika	37
160	Radeče Papir Group	45	200	MBS List	37
161	Mobik telekomunikacije	45			
162	Walstead Leykam tiskarna	44			
163	ETA Cerklje	44			
164	Finiks Group	44			
165	Sumida Slovenija	44			

Source: AJPES / Data source: audited and consolidated annual reports for 2022 (publicly available by 3 January 2024) / Processed by: Podjetna Slovenija
 * Biggest groups and companies by net sales revenue in foreign markets / ** Leading company in the group



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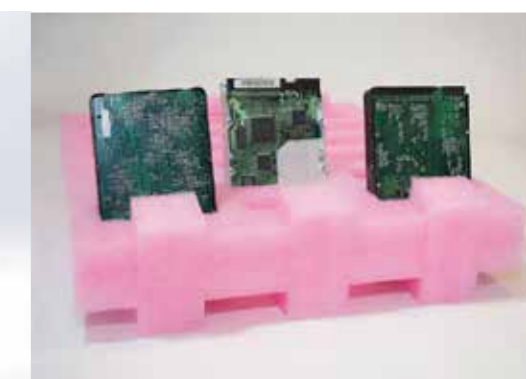
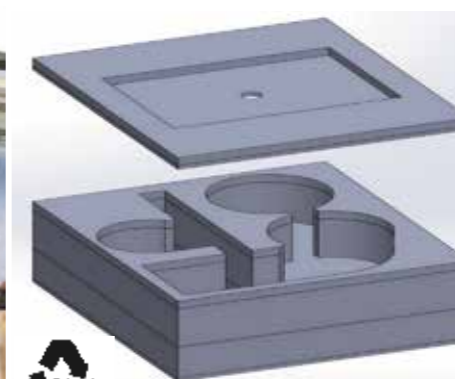
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Are you familiar with the Slovenian economy?

This small country in the middle of Europe is also economically prosperous. Slovenians don't mind living in a small country with only two million people. In fact, there are quite a few non-sporting disciplines where Slovenia is in the company of the greatest despite its small size.

MAJA VIRANT



Photo: Albin Bežjak, Public Institute Ptuj / slovenia.info

1. Employment hits record high

77.5% employment in the 20–64 age group.

Last year, 77.5% of people aged 20–64 were employed in Slovenia, according to Eurostat. The EU average is only slightly lower, at 75.3%, but it is certainly a record. Globally, the percentage is much lower. The average stops at 58%, according to Statist. As a result, the unemployment rate is at a record low. Last year, Slovenia's unemployment rate was 3.5%, the lowest in the neighbourhood. Croatia's was 6.3%, Italy's even higher at 7.7%, Austria's 5.3% and Hungary's 4.1%. The world average exceeded 5% last year (5.1%).

2. Slovenia is growing faster than the EU

1.1 percentage points.

This is how much faster than the EU Slovenia grew on average in 2019–2023. In this period, Slovenia's GDP growth or decline was only once worse than that of the EU.

3. Exports are the highest ever

€ 54.9 billion in exports in 2023.

Last year, exports amounted to € 54.9 billion, an all-time record. Compared to 2022, they were 4.4% higher. Exports to non-EU countries grew in particular, with medical and pharmaceutical products accounting for as much as a third of export value.

	Country	Exports (€ million)
1.	Switzerland	15,005
2.	Germany	7,428
3.	Italy	4,732
4.	Croatia	4,320
5.	Austria	3,150
6.	France	1,824
7.	Poland	1,343
8.	Serbia	1,265
9.	Hungary	1,225
10.	Russian Federation	1,106

Source: SORS

4. Most attractive for German investors

No. 1 business location in Central and Eastern Europe.

Slovenia is the most attractive destination for German investors. Our country was ranked first as a business location in a region of 15 countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This is according to the results of a survey involving representatives of the participating companies, which was presented this year at the annual conference of the German-Slovene Chamber of Commerce and Industry entitled "Economic situation and investment climate".

5. Remarkable growth of large entrepreneurs

1/3 of the country's 600 largest companies are owned by entrepreneurs.

According to the Podjetna Slovenija magazine, more and more of the largest companies in the country are owned by entrepreneurs. In the February edition of the magazine, there were already 189 such companies among the 600 largest. This means that almost a third of the 600 largest companies are owned by people who, in 1991, when Slovenia attained its independence, had a small trade, started a business in a garage somewhere, and may or may not have done it as a hobby. Slovenia thus developed a strong economic backbone.

6. Tourist records are being broken

3 times as many tourists as residents.

As many as 6.19 million tourists visited Slovenia last year, which is the absolute record. That's three times as many tourists as Slovenia's population. Last year was even better than the pre-COVID year of 2019, which was the most successful year for tourism until then. Germans were the largest group of foreign guests (16%), followed by Italians, Austrians, Czechs, Dutch and Croatians. Most of them stayed in the mountain municipalities and in the capital. Ljubljana, the Šalek Valley, Brežice, Jeruzalem, Miren Kras and Kranj were among the six Slovenian destinations included in the global Green Destinations Top 100 Stories list. Each year, destinations from all over the world submit their stories for the Top 100 Green Destinations Stories. From these submissions, an expert panel draws up a list of 100 examples of best practices. Slovenian destinations are regularly included on the list.

7. Share of tertiary-educated higher than in the EU

8th highest share of employees in knowledge-intensive activities.

The education structure of the workforce is improving, and the share of the knowledge-based economy is increasing. The share of tertiary-educated people (specialists, in particular) in the active working population has increased significantly over the 2010–2020 period, well above the EU average and no longer lagging far behind the leading innovating countries. This is also reflected in the 8th highest share of employees in knowledge-intensive activities, according to the Productivity Report.

8. Economic resilience is very good

9th place on the Economic Resilience Index.

Slovenia ranks relatively high in the EU, at ninth place in the Economic Resilience Index, which is a result of its high level of social cohesion, economic independence, and financial resilience, according to the Productivity Report 2023 published by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development of the Republic of Slovenia (UMAR).

9. Business innovation: above the EU average for the first time

55% of companies were innovation active in 2018–2020.

In 2018–2020, the share of innovation-active businesses exceeded the EU average for the first time in a decade, at 55%, and investment has so far accelerated mainly in machinery and equipment, according to the Productivity Report. At the same time, positive trends can be seen in some other areas, such as investment in marketing, while the companies' environmental investments are also expected to increase significantly.

10. Economic complexity is growing

From 12th to 5th place in two decades

The economy is successfully integrating into global value chains, including by upgrading its functional and technological specialisation. Slovenia is moving up the production chain while at the same time supplementing the production function with other functions more successfully than other competing countries, with research and development being particularly important.

The positive aspect of these efforts is seen in using knowledge from a growing number of fields to develop new products, which is reflected in its growing economic complexity, where it has risen to 5th place (from 12th) over the last two decades, and is also ranked 5th in the EU in terms of the share of exports of medium- and high-technology-intensive products, according to the Productivity Report.

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*“If you buy a Slovenian product,
you’re buying German quality,
Italian design and the Slavic knack
of improvisation.”*

Interview: Franjo Bobinac, President of the Slovenian Olympic Committee

“We Slovenes are a nation with sport in our genes.”

- What sport did the president of the Slovenian Olympic Committee love when he was young?
- Why is Slovenia so strong in sports?
- How do Slovenian products connect Germans, Italians and Slavs?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

According to Franjo Bobinac, President of the Slovenian Olympic Committee, Association of Sports Federations (OKS-ZŠZ), the best way for brands to reach customers is via the emotions. And the most positive emotions are triggered by sport. He has been closely involved in sport ever since he was a boy.

Did you play any sports when you were young?

Yes, a lot of sports. Ball games were my favourite. I was much better at them than, say, gymnastics. I loved basketball. I never played for a top club but we used to play 3x3 and shoot hoops with players who went on to become big names. I also played a lot of tennis and table tennis and I was a keen skier.

I followed all sports. In those days we all used to read the sports newspaper *Sportske novosti*, which had the most complete coverage. I’m not kidding when I say I even used to read the small print!

Women’s basketball was big in Celje in those days, wasn’t it?

Yes, and of course handball was even bigger. I used to go and watch matches with Celje’s star handball

players, the Bojovič brothers, and the rest of the team. As well as in basketball, where we had the Sagadin brothers, Celje was strong in athletics. Top long-distance runner Stane Rozman came from more or less the same generation as me.

You’ve occupied various roles in sport. Which has been your favourite?

In recent years I’ve mainly been a sports official or executive, and this is a role I’m more than happy in. When I was younger, though, I wanted to become a basketball player and play for top clubs... If only I’d been 20 centimetres taller!

At the moment I’m enjoying being the president of the umbrella organisation of Slovenian sport. This feels like the ideal job for me at this stage of my life. I’m good at connecting people and different interests. I understand the various stakeholders. My team and I work together to find the best solutions for the development of sport.

Our activities are international, complex and interesting. My 14 years at the head of the Slovenian Handball Federation served as good training for my current role, as did my many years managing an international business conglomerate.



Even when you were at Gorenje, one of Slovenia's biggest manufacturing companies, you were still very involved in sports such as ski jumping and handball. During your time working in France, Gorenje was the sponsor of football team there...

Yes, we were the sponsors of OGC Nice.

Why did you invest so much in sport?

I worked at Gorenje for over 30 years, half of that time as CEO. It seems to me that we always understood very clearly that sport could be a fantastic way to build brand reputation.

Today's Gorenje – or its owner Hisense – continues to support sport. They understand that their customers are the final consumers of their products. And that you need to attract final consumers by being different and also by appealing to their emotions.

Sport can provide more positive emotions than almost anything else. That is why the Gorenje brand continues to be associated with handball and Nordic skiing. We've stuck with our athletes through thick and thin. We've never pulled out. And this year our handball team are national champions again.

Hisense, as the group's global brand, has been a UEFA and FIFA partner since 2016 and has also signed partnerships with individual clubs such as Paris Saint-Germain in France and Leeds in England, among others. Gorenje has occasionally ventured into other sports, such as sailing in Australia and football in other countries.



“Sport inspires young people, sports stars are ambassadors of prestige and sporting successes unite the nation like nothing else.”

Now you are the head of the national Olympic Committee and Slovenia is about to have its strongest ever team in Paris. Are you optimistic?

Until now the biggest Slovenian team was the one that went to Athens, with 79 athletes. This year we already knew in May that there would be 90 or perhaps even nearly 100 Slovenian athletes in Paris. We've never qualified for more than one team event at the Olympics. This year it was clear in June that we were going to qualify for three and still had a chance of qualifying in a fourth – basketball. If everyone is fit and can give of their best, I believe that we will do well.

I'm optimistic because the preparations have gone well. Because all our athletes are in good shape, apart from a few injuries that happened a while ago. The officials who make up our Olympic Committee also fill me with enthusiasm. The Olympic Committee works closely with national federations in various sports to help prepare athletes and help with organisation, logistics and business aspects.

This year is not the first time that we will have a Slovenia House at the Olympic Games. But never before have we offered such a full and boldly conceived accompanying programme. I lived in France for five years and I know Paris pretty well. I'm happy that we chose a location in the Parc de la Villette in good time.

Later we found out that France's national pavilion, Club France, is there too. The hosts of the Games are our closest neighbours! Some of the other countries are there too. Slovenia House will be a place to celebrate sport and sporting success and to meet the athletes, especially after they have finished competing. Paris is going to be the centre of the world this year, and not just the sporting world.

The Slovenian government is also enthusiastic about it. We have the support of the entire Slovenian government. We'll also be organising business events

and offering presentations of tourism, the business sector, culture, cuisine and so on. There will also be a space for diplomatic meetings.

Is there any particular reason why Slovenia is so strong in sport? And why so many Slovenian niche companies are so successful? Is there any parallel between these two spheres?

The Slovenian model in sports is clearly a very successful one. Of course, there is always room for improvement. The fact is, though, we really are a nation with sport in our genes.

It starts with families, with upbringing. If children get used to sport being a part of life – be it cycling, skiing, ball games, athletics or any other sport – then this is something that is passed on to future generations.

There's something else as well. Slovenia has never gone in for a clear specialisation among branches of sport like some countries – Hungary, for example – have done. We also have very good professionals, very good education and excellent coaches.

Back in the days of Yugoslavia there was some specialisation. Alpine skiing was very strong, as was ski jumping.



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That's true. That specialisation disappeared after Slovenia became independent. Today the Slovenian Olympic Committee is also a proud organisation called the Association of Sports Federations. Now, by contrast, the strength of sports is very dispersed. This is important, because there is no elite sport without sport at the local level. There are no elite sportsmen or sportswomen – Dončić, Pogačar, Garnbret, to name but three – who did not start off in a local club.

If athletes are the heart of Slovenian sport, then clubs, societies and associations are its backbone. A wide diversity of sports, a lot of support from parents and families, and a widespread network of volunteers – without these things there is no Slovenian sport. Sport inspires young people, sports stars are ambassadors of prestige and sporting successes unite the nation like nothing else.

When children with sport in their genes grow up, they get jobs. They might be in charge of marketing or sales, or they might become directors, business owners, entrepreneurs. No wonder they support sport. The values are similar: ambition, perseverance, fighting spirit, teamwork...

When I'm looking for someone to fill a position, I'll always choose someone who plays a sport, because I know exactly what I'm getting. Sportspeople are also capable of picking themselves up when they fall. That is also part of business life. I know entrepreneurs. Each one of them has their own story. But I do not know a single one who was successful at their first attempt.

What makes sport interesting to businesses today?

From a marketing point of view, sport is a way of getting through to people. And people are the final consumers of goods and services. Customers these days are spoilt for choice when the time comes to pull their wallet out and buy a product or service. The easiest way to speak to them is through their emotions. That's why companies try to build an emotional relationship with customers. And sport is the biggest generator of emotions of all.

For a small country like Slovenia, sustaining elite-level sport over the long term is quite a challenge. Are you optimistic that Slovenia will continue to be as strong in the future?

Unlike some other countries, in Slovenia we don't only have the backing of the state – with the government and sports ministry making a significant contribution to sport – but also the support of businesses that have seen in sport and the Olympic movement a way to raise their profile and grow the prestige of their brand. At the moment around a third of the Slovenian Olympic Committee's budget comes from the state, a third from private sponsors and the rest from European and international projects, some of them involving the International Olympic Committee and European Olympic Committees.

The role played by entrepreneurs, businesspeople and private sponsors is extremely important. On the other hand it needs to be said that over the last two years we've been sending the message – as seriously and constructively as possible – to the ministry and the government that Slovenian sport deserves more. This was the slogan of my campaign when I was a candidate for the position I currently occupy. I'm pleased that less than two years later we're already close to doubling the amount of money earmarked for sport, which is what I predicted at the time.

This is extremely good news, but the important thing is that this amount should continue to gradually increase. Then there is the fact that we also badly need changes to tax legislation to make it more development-oriented and incentivising for sport and for athletes, coaches, clubs and businesses that invest in sport.

Are you feeling optimistic ahead of the Olympic Games? What would be a satisfactory result for Slovenia's athletes?

I have never counted medals and I never will, although of course we want them and dream about them. The biggest achievement is that this year we are sending our biggest ever team to the Olympics. We can also be proud of Slovenia House.



“Paris is going to be the centre of the world this year, and not just the sporting world.”

If we come home with some medals, that will be the cherry on the cake. Every medal is a superlative achievement. Given the competition, in some sports it is a superlative achievement just to qualify for the final – in athletics, swimming and other global sports, for example. In cycling we are the best in the world. The same in climbing. We have several winning cards.

Perhaps Slovenia will score a big result in a team sport at this year's Games. Given Slovenia's small size, it would really be a special achievement if Slovenia were to win a medal in a team sport, wouldn't it?

Even the fact that we've succeeded in qualifying for so many team events at the Olympics probably already means that we are number one in the world in a per capita sense.

What should the global business community know about Slovenia but perhaps does not?

Years ago, when I used to show foreign business partners and friends – including the French – around Slovenia, there was still a lot of ignorance about the country. But things have really changed a lot since then. Now they know us.

We are a proud and dependable member of the European Union and NATO. We adopted the euro a long time ago. Slovenia is a member of the UN Security Council. Recognition is also due to the Slovenian Tourist Board, which has patiently built up Slovenia's profile as a destination that offers a special form of green niche tourism.

On the other hand many people still aren't sure where Slovenia is. But when we mention Dončić, Roglič and other top sportsmen and sportswomen, they are immediately able to locate us. That is why sportspeople really are good ambassadors, while at the same time serving as an inspiration to young people and as a kind of glue that binds the nation together.

Can Slovenia also be a nice place to live and work for foreigners who would like to move here?

When I was living in France and working for Gorenje, one of our commercial partners asked me why he should buy one of our fridges rather than one made by our competitors. And he told me that I

only had five minutes to make my case. That was the shortest business conversation I've ever had in my life. But because I knew he was deliberately being a little bit provocative – France is a country that likes the bold approach – I gave him a bold answer in as few words as possible.

I told him that I would answer his question in three minutes, not five, and save him two precious minutes. My answer was this: "If you buy a Slovenian product, you're buying German quality, Italian design and the Slavic knack of improvisation. You might not get your order in on time, but we'll still deliver the products to you on schedule."

We Slovenes live at a crossroads of cultures. I've travelled all over the world and got to know other cultures close up. We Slovenes are actually serious and structured, the way Germans can be, but we also have a touch of Balkan resourcefulness and the relaxed attitude of the Latin world. And because we're very creative and brave, we're successful both in sport and in business. >>



#BlockPlasticBag, pass the Organko Daily!

How can elite sport increase brand awareness?

At this year's Olympic Games in Paris, Slovenia will also be represented for the first time by the Slovenian men's volleyball team. This outstanding achievement is further proof of the talent and passion of our athletes, who have written another Slovenian sports success story with their hard work and perseverance.



"We had faith in them to write a new chapter in the history of Slovenian sport, because the team is top quality, passionate and close-knit. That's why we decided to support them even before they qualified for the Olympics," said Niko Medved, Deputy Director of Skaza, after the team won the first match of the Nations League tournament in Ljubljana, which secured their ticket to the Games in Paris.

Together with Slovenian heroes, Skaza has launched the campaign #BlockPlasticBag, pass the Organko Daily!, which combines the fundamentals of volleyball with Skaza's key message – no more plastic bags in organic waste: "We drew on terms used in volleyball and looked for common points in order to communicate the campaign's key message. Volleyball players block the ball at the net and pass it to each other, so with the #BlockPlasticBag, pass the Organko Daily! campaign we turned volleyball players into

heroes who are committed to keeping the environment clean by blocking plastic bags from reaching organic waste. It's essential that we offer people a solution to this problem, and so Organko Daily! is made from 100% recycled materials, is available in a range of colours, and suitable for every kitchen counter," Jelena Rašula, Head of Marketing at Skaza, said about the sponsorship.

As a result of the sponsorship, Skaza hopes to increase its brand recognition and improve consumer awareness. Single-use plastics account for 40% of all plastics produced each year. In 2022, as many as 130 billion plastic bags were used globally, which is more than 3 billion a day. Their production consumes vast amounts of oil, contributing to emissions of greenhouse gases and the destruction of natural habitats. Plastic is also entering our food supply through marine organisms that end up on our plates.

Through this sponsorship, Skaza has combined the best sports achievements of the Slovenian national volleyball team with its commitment to sustainable development. We're aware that the Olympic Games are one of the most popular global events, which is why we're actively advocating for the reduction of plastic bag use with the #BlockPlasticBag, pass the Organko Daily! campaign. In this way, we are promoting Slovenia as a country committed to both sports and sustainability, and reinforcing its image as an innovative economy championing sustainable practices.

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Promo



Slovenian athletes at Paris 2024

Slovenian athletes by sport

Sport	F	M	Total
1 Athletics – track & field	5	2	7
2 Gymnastics –rhythmic	1		1
3 Gymnastics –artistic	1		1
4 Golf	1		1
5 Sailing	3	3	6
6 Judo	5	1	6
7 Canoeing – canoe slalom	2	2	4
8 Cycling – road cycling	2	4	6
9 Cycling –mountain biking	1		1
10 Archery	1	1	2
11 Table tennis		3	3
12 Volleyball		12	12
13 Sport climbing	2	1	3
14 Swimming	4	1	5
15 Handball	14	14	28
16 Taekwondo		1	1
17 Rowing	1	1	2
TOTAL	43	46	89



Photo: stock.adobe.com

Slovenian athletes by name

ATHLETICS – TRACK & FIELD

Athlete	Gender	Event
Anika Horvat	F	800 m
Klara Lukan	F	1000 m / 5000 m
Lia Apostolovski	F	high jump
Neja Filipič	F	triple jump
Tina Šutej	F	pole vault
Kristjan Čeh	M	discus
Matic Ian Guček	M	400 m hurdles

GYMNASTICS – RHYTHMIC

Athlete	Gender	Event
Ekaterina Vedeneeva	F	all-around

GYMNASTICS – ARTISTIC

Athlete	Gender	Event
Lucija Hribar	F	all-around

GOLF

Athlete	Gender	Event
Ana Belac	F	individual

SAILING

Athlete	Gender	Event
Lin Pletikos	F	ILCA 6
Lina Eržen	F	iQFoil
Toni Vodišek	M	Formula Kite
Tina Mrak & Jakob Božič	F/M	470
Žan Luka Zelko	M	ILCA 7

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Glavni medijski sponzor:



Veliki sponzorji:



JUDO

Athlete	Gender	Event
Andreja Leški	F	- 63 kg
Anka Pogačnik	F	- 70 kg
Kaja Kajzer	F	- 57 kg
Maruša Štangar	F	- 48 kg
Metka Lobnik	F	- 78 kg
Enej Marinič	M	+ 100 kg

CANOEING –CANOE SLALOM

Athlete	Gender	Event
Eva Alina Hočevar	F	C-1 / K-1 kayak cross
Eva Terčelj	F	K-1 / K-1 kayak cross
Benjamin Savšek	M	C-1 / K-1 kayak cross
Peter Kauzer	M	K-1 / K-1 kayak cross

CYCLING –ROAD CYCLING

Athlete	Gender	Event
Eugenia Bujak	F	road race / time trial
Urška Pintar	F	road race / time trial
Jan Tratnik	M	road race / time trial
Luka Mezgec	M	road race
Matej Mohorič	M	road race
Tadej Pogačar	M	road race

CYCLING –MOUNTAIN BIKING

Athlete	Gender	Event
Tanja Žakelj	F	cross-country

ARCHERY

Athlete	Gender	Event
Žana Pintarič	F	individual recurve / team recurve
Žiga Ravnikar	M	individual recurve / team recurve

TABLE TENNIS

Athlete	Gender	Event
Darko Jorgič	M	individual /team
Deni Kožul	M	individual / team
Peter Hribar	M	team

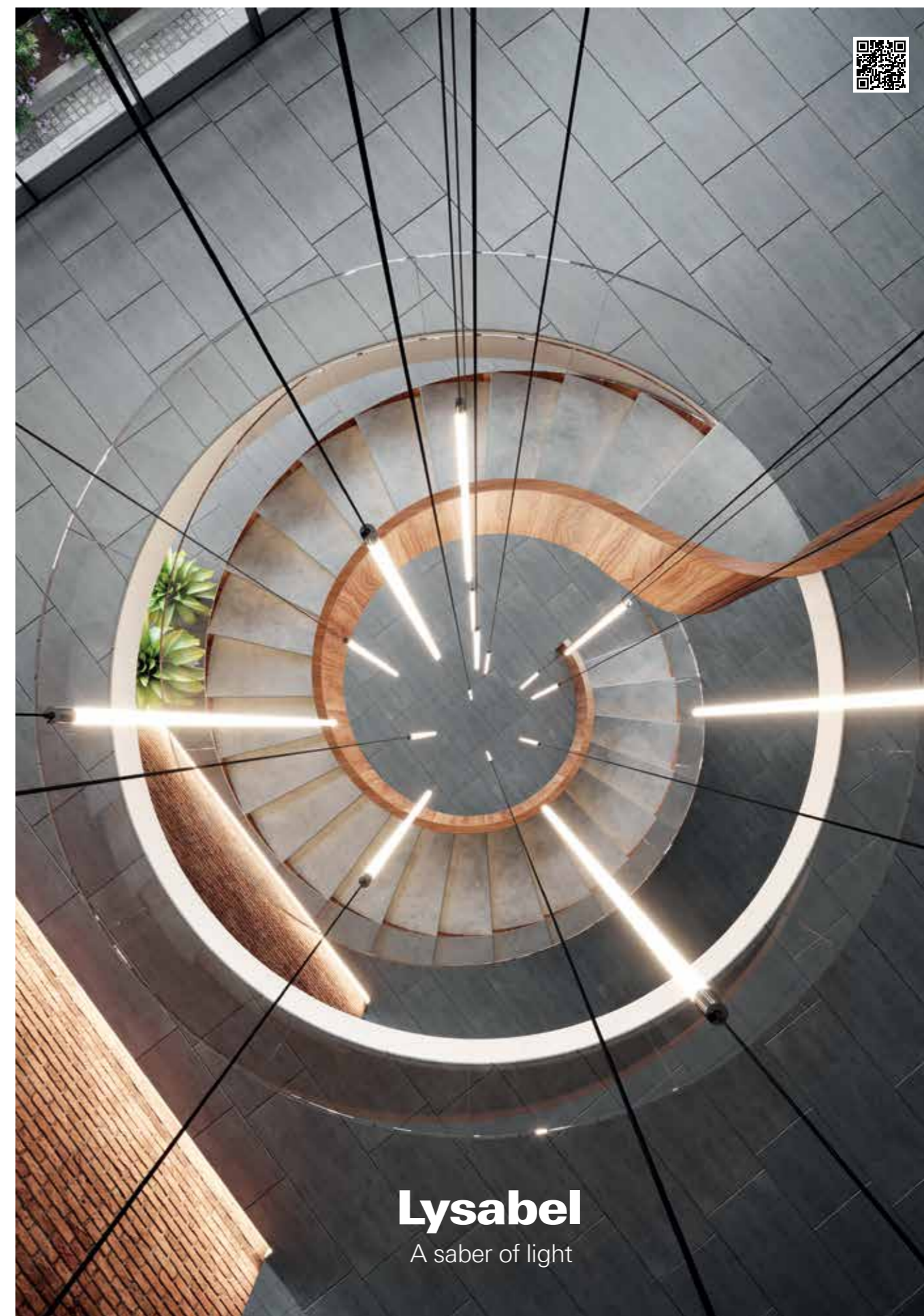
VOLLEYBALL

Athlete	Gender	Event
Men's team (12x)		



Photo: stock.adobe.com

Sponzorji:



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SPORT CLIMBING

Athlete	Gender	Event
Janja Garnbret	F	combined
Mia Krampł	F	combined
Luka Potočar	M	combined

SWIMMING

Athlete	Gender	Event
Neža Klančar	F	50 m freestyle / 100 m freestyle
Katja Fain	F	4 x 100 m freestyle
Janja Šegel	F	4 x 100 m freestyle
Tjaša Pintar	F	4 x 100 m freestyle
Sašo Boškarič	M	100 m freestyle / 200 m freestyle

HANDBALL

Athlete	Gender	Event
Women's team (14x)		
Men's team (14x)		

TAEKWONDO

Athlete	Gender	Event
Patrik Divkovič	M	+ 80 kg

ROWING

Athlete	Spol	Event
Isak Ivan Žvegelj	M	single scull
Nina Kostanjšek	F	single scull

Source: OKS-ZSZ

* As of July 7th, it was unknown whether golfer Pia Babnik would qualify for the Olympic Games in Paris.

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Slovenia House - better than ever before

- Located in the Parc de la Villette, which will see around 100,000 visitors every day.
- Varied activities, from business events to water volleyball.
- Welcome to Slovenia in the middle of Paris!

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ

Slovenia House, set up for the duration of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, is located in the Parc de la Villette, close to the Stade de France and Olympic Village. It is in this park that the various national houses, the French TV studio and the largest official fan zone will be located during the Olympic Games. Around 100,000 visitors are expected to come to La Villette every day.

A unique opportunity for businesses

Slovenia House hosts business meetings, economic conferences, business clubs, consultations and scientific symposia. Special attention is paid to the ties between Slovenia and France in various economic, cultural and sporting fields. Slovenia House acts as a venue for showcasing various businesses, tourism offers, products, and so on.

Around 100,000 visitors are expected to come to La Villette every day.



Slovenia House hosts business meetings, economic conferences, business clubs, consultations and scientific symposia.

Foto: OCS



Foto: OCS

This is thus a great opportunity for large, medium and small companies, as networking and exchange of good practices is possible. All these activities are taking place during the world's biggest sporting event, and can greatly benefit both Slovenian and visiting country representatives and business people.

This centre for public and private events is intended for various guests and is addressing topics related to the Slovenian economy, tourism, culture, science and, of course, Slovenian sport.

3x Slovenia...

Through all these efforts, Slovenia is being showcased at this year's Olympic Games in three ways:

- as a sporting superpower and a sought-after tourist destination,
- as a reliable economic partner; and
- as a country of top scientists and outstanding artists.

... and lots of fun

Slovenia House, with its own garden and a covered terrace along the riverbank, is of course also open to the general public, who can learn about Slovenian culture, sports, traditions, cuisine and science.

The outdoor areas feature concerts, other cultural and artistic performances, culinary experiences, as well as a children's corner with Foksi, Slovenia's Olympic mascot, and space for water volleyball.

Slovenia House in Paris undoubtedly serves as a dynamic meeting point for businesses, cultural exchanges and sporting pride. From 27 July to 11 August 2024, it will be a lively hub of activity, attracting prominent Slovenian and international figures.

Grand opening with distinguished guests

Slovenia House officially opens its doors on 27 July 2024 at 2 pm, with the President of Slovenia, Nataša Pirc Musar, in attendance to deliver her opening speech on women's empowerment. This will set the tone for the world-class events to follow. Participation in the opening ceremony was announced well in advance by the Director of UNESCO and key representatives of the International Olympic Committee.

Business meetings and networking at the highest level

The interior of Slovenia House is designed for high-level B2B meetings, collaborations and the signing of contracts. This part serves as a meeting point for Slovenian business people from various associations, including the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia and the Managers' Association of Slovenia. Prominent

National partner:



Main partner:



Major partner:



Partners:



Partners:



Architectural design:



Business and other events at Slovenia House

Internal events:

- **27 July:** Grand opening of Slovenia House
- **28 July:** Round table: Gender Equality in Sports
- **29 July:** Slovenian Tourist Board event
- **30 July:** Day of Slovenians in Paris with the Minister for Slovenians abroad, Matej Arčon
- **31 July:** SPIRIT event – “E-mobility and Sustainable Development”, in cooperation with the Managers’ Association of Slovenia
- **2 August:** Round table: Sustainability and the Green Breakthrough
- **5 August:** Round table: Athletes and Second Careers
- **7 August:** SPIRIT event: “Slovenian Business Champions at the Olympic Games”, in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia
- **8 August:** Presentation of the European Capital of Culture 2025, Nova Gorica, with the Minister of Culture, Asta Vrečko
- **10 August:** Slovenian Tourist Board media event
- **11 August 2024:** Closing ceremony and closing of Slovenia House

External events:

- Daily DJ performances
- Large LED screen for watching competitions
- Concerts and fashion shows
- Breakdance challenges and special activities
- Presentation of the City of Ljubljana

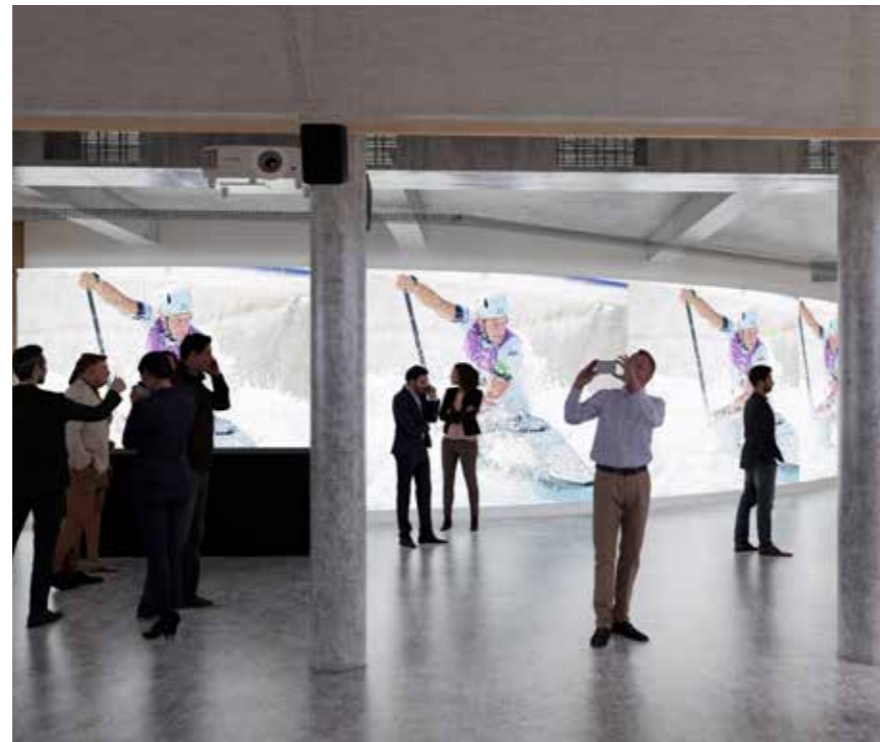


Foto: OCS

entrepreneurs and top politicians from Slovenia are joining the events. The hospitality house and all the activities planned provide unparalleled opportunities for networking and the formation of business partnerships.

One of the most anticipated events, the panel entitled *Sustainability and Green Breakthrough*, is taking place on 2 August 2024. The discussion, with a focus on sustainability, will kick off with an opening speech by the Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob and will include a keynote speech by Dr Janez Potočnik, a long-serving European Commissioner from Slovenia. This international event is undoubtedly an attraction for distinguished guests from all over the world and underlines Slovenia’s commitment to sustainable development and green initiatives.

Celebrating Slovenia’s sporting achievements

Slovenia House also celebrates the rich heritage of Slovenian sport. Events are focused on athletes’ transitions to other careers, with Slovenian sports stars such as Tina Maze and Urška Žolnir taking part, along with Mihai Claudiu Covaliu, a retired sabre fencer and President of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee.

Our former top canoeist Andraž Vehovar is serving as presenter of the event. The focus of the event is on sharing the views and experiences of these legendary figures, inspiring future generations. Several prominent international sports legends are expected to attend, adding a further global dimension to the proceedings.

Fan zone: Where passion meets fun

The outdoor area of Slovenia House is dedicated to fans and provides a lively atmosphere where passion for sport meets entertainment. This space is open to all and includes live DJ performances, a large LED screen to watch the competitions, concerts, fashion shows and breakdance challenges.

Fans can take part in special challenges designed to test their courage and endurance, ensuring an unforgettable experience.

Michelin stars at Slovenia House

This will be an unforgettable experience featuring the finest cuisine by Jezeršek Catering and Hospitality Ambassador 2024 Klara Šmigoc. “Guests will be served authentic Slovenian food – cured meat delicacies, selected cheeses from various Slovenian hills and delicious hot dishes, including *idrijski žlikrofi*, *štruklji*, buckwheat *ričota*, Piran sea bass, Carniolan sausage, pan dishes, as well as award-winning cakes and delicacies from the sweet pantry,” said the chef Luka Jezeršek about the varied gastronomic offering planned.

In cooperation with the best Slovenian chef and winner of three Michelin stars, Ana Roš, and her team from Hiša Franko, Jezeršek Catering will prepare a very special lunch for select guests at Slovenia House.

Welcome to Slovenia in the middle of Paris! ➡➡

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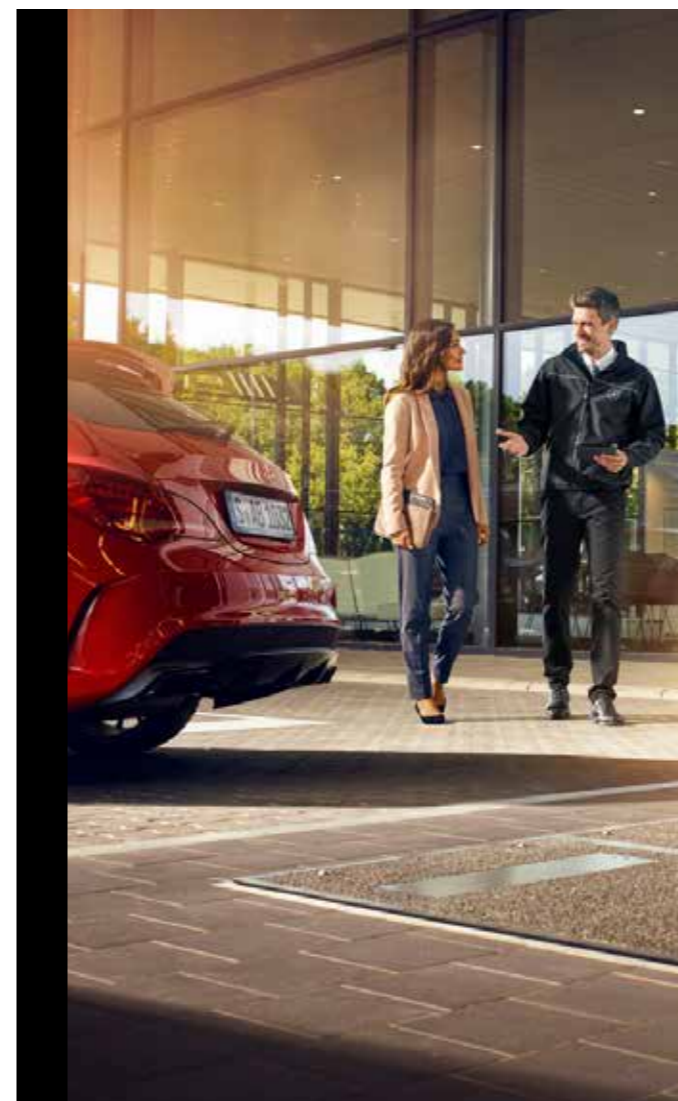
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Plenty of aces in the Olympic fire

- Will Janja Garnbret successfully defend her Tokyo Olympic gold medal in women's sport climbing in Paris?
- Will Peter Kauzer win another Olympic medal at the age of 40?
- Who are the other strong Slovenian medal contenders and the potential surprise winners?

TOMI ŠUJDOVIČ

Slovenian Olympic champions are not in the habit of returning home empty-handed. Janja Garnbret, Primož Roglič, Tadej Pogačar, Benjamin Savšek and Tina Trstenjak all won medals in Tokyo. Trstenjak also brought a medal from Rio, alongside Peter Kauzer, Vasilij Žbogar and Ana Velenšek.

Iztok Čop brought home several medals from London, Athens and Sidney – in tandem with Luka Špič – as well as from Barcelona, where Slovenian athletes made their first appearance under their country's colours. Leon Štukelj won Olympic gold a century ago, also in Paris, where today's sporting heroes from the sunny side of the Alps will try to follow his example.

From 26 July to 11 August, the Olympic Village, spread across Saint-Denis, Saint-Ouen and L'Île-Saint-Denis in the north of Paris, will host a number of Slovenians who share aspirations, dreams and plans to add to the rich legacy of Slovenian Olympic achievements.

If we were to list all the Olympic heroes, starting with the fencer Rudolf Cvetek, who took home Slovenia's first silver medal as early as 1912, we would run out of space. So let us pay tribute to all of them, those named and those not, because it is time to write new Olympic legends.



Photo: Ales Fevžer

Mia Krampčič, climbing



Photo: Ales Fevžer

Darko Joričić, table tennis



Photo: Ales Fevžer

Kaja Kajzer, judo



Photo: Alamy.com

Janja Garnbret, climbing



Photo: Ales Fevžer

Benjamin Savšek, canoe

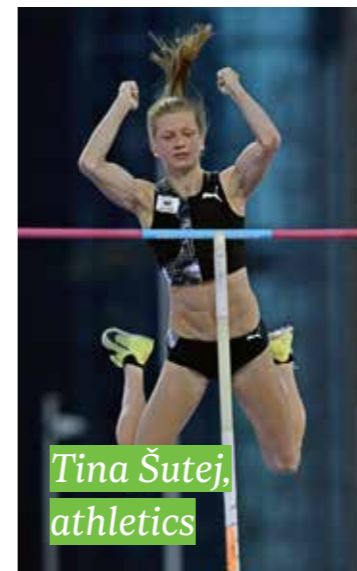


Photo: Alamy.com

Tina Šutej, athletics



Photo: Alamy.com

Andreja Leški, judo



Photo: Ales Fevžer

Toni Vodišek, kitesurfing



Photo: Ales Fevžer

Kristjan Čeh, athletics

Golden spider-woman

Janja Garnbret's legend began in Tokyo three years ago, where she became the first woman ever to win an Olympic gold in sport climbing. But that was only the first chapter, because the climbing ace from Šmartno near Slovenj Gradec will again be the favourite for the (fastest) climb at the Paris Olympics.

The friendly and talkative 25-year-old from Koroška, who can be seen casually climbing the 360-metre chimney in the Slovenian town of Trbovlje, the highest in Europe, with a Red Bull helmet on her head, is currently pushing the boundaries in her discipline. Her resume speaks for itself, with eight gold World Championship medals to go with her Olympic gold medal and 43 World Cup victories.

But Garnbret is more than an athlete. She has managed, after all, to become an international star in a sport whose global reach and popularity cannot be compared with athletics, gymnastics, tennis, swimming, and the like. The crowds that flock to her for an autograph or a photo, especially in Asia, speak volumes.

Nevertheless, she has remained down-to-earth. Even before this year's Games, where she will defend her gold as the absolute favourite – on 6 August at the indoor climbing centre in Le Bourget, a suburb of Paris – she spoke of her rivals with humility and respect.

Olympic hopefuls on the rapids and in kitesurfing

The Slovenian kayaking champion Peter Kauzer is a man who is not shy when it comes to speaking his mind. He has also broken a paddle or two during his career, for example in 2008 in Beijing, where he went straight for the gold, but came up empty-handed. As he did four years later in London, where he proudly waved the Slovenian flag at the opening ceremony, then, after finishing sixth, threw some barbs at the "couch potatoes" in front of their TVs back home.

"Medal or no medal. The important thing is to stay healthy," he said ahead of the 2016 Rio Games, where he finally made his dream come true with a silver medal. He will go to Paris as relaxed – following two individual World and European Championships – as when he went to Tokyo, where he failed to tame the rapids. Although already 40 years old, Kauzer is not a man to be written off.

The well-liked "Kapsl" will not be the only Slovenian star at the Vaires-sur-Marne whitewater venue on the eastern outskirts of Paris. And he won't be the main favourite for a medal, either. The canoeist Benjamin Savšek is the reigning Olympic champion, who won his second World Championship gold in London last year, and whose trophy case also includes four European Championship titles.

At 37, he too has not had his last word. After all, that's what the world ranking shows. But here's what's even more exciting: the second-ranked Savšek is not even the best ranked Slovene. At the top is Luka Božič, who is also determined to (one day) win an Olympic medal. In what is one of Slovenia's flagship Olympic disciplines, the women's kayaking team also has ambitious plans, especially with 32-year-old Eva Terčelj.

The flag of Slovenian judo, which has also brought the country a lot of success in the past, will be taken up in Paris by Andreja Leški. The 27-year-old current European champion and former World champion will try to build on the brilliant achievements of Tina Trstenjak, Ana Velenšek, Lucija Polavder and Urška Žolnir in the -63 kg category. Her fifth place at the recent World Championships certainly didn't take the wind out of her sails, quite the opposite. And in Paris, she will not be alone on the tatami, as Kaja Kajzer could also spring a surprise.

It will be no surprise to see Slovenia's beach boy, kiteboarder Toni Vodišek, in the medal fight.

"I'm someone who has to have fun," says Toni. Competing in the Olympics is already fun for him. Winning a medal would be even more fun.

Next strides in athletics and table tennis?

In the queen of the sports – athletics – Tina Šutej, who is capable of reaching the greatest heights, will try to make a mark in the pole vault. However, Slovenia's main hope is Kristjan Čeh, the Hercules of Ptuj. The gold in the discus throw from the 2022 World Championships in Eugene, Oregon, last year's silver in Budapest, the Diamond League title two years ago,

and the personal best of 71.86 metres from last June give the 206-cm-tall athlete plenty of hope for his first Olympic medal.

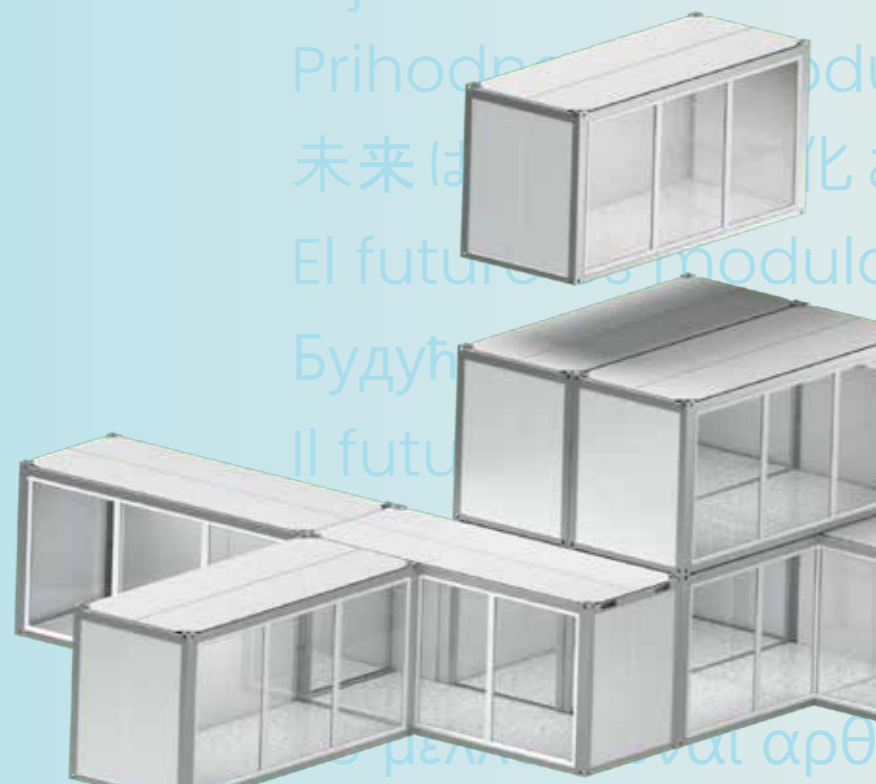
His throws this year may not be as impressive as before, and especially not as consistent, but the 70.48 metres he threw in Doha suggests that the man whose preferred "forbidden stimulants" are steaks and hamburgers could be heading for a medal in Paris. He is certainly ambitious enough, as evidenced by his bid to break the record of the East German athlete Jürgen Schult, who threw 74.08 metres almost four decades ago.

In Tokyo, Čeh threw 66.37 metres to finish 5th, a place also achieved by Darko Jorgić, another Slovenian contender in the Paris Games. The superb table tennis player from Hrastnik, long ranked in the world's top 20, could be in the fight for the medals in Paris, provided the draw is in his favour. Or in other words – if he can only avoid the Chinese for as long as possible. Although there is no reason why the best Slovenian table tennis player of all time should not challenge them, too.

There are more than enough Slovenian medal contenders, both obvious and hidden, so we shouldn't be surprised if the Slovenian anthem, Zdravljica, will be played more than once in Paris. >>

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Inspiring Paralympic aces

- Who are Slovenia's Paralympic stars?
- Which Paralympians have chosen a second career in business?
- How successful was Slovenia at the Paralympic Games?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ



Photo: Sarmio Vitić

"If I can change someone's outlook on life just a little bit for the positive with my experience, then my mission has achieved its purpose," says Darko Đurić.

someone's outlook on life just a little bit for the positive with my experience, then my mission has achieved its purpose," says Darko Đurić.

He has never been an active jobseeker, instead always securing his own employment. In the past, he was also co-founder and CEO of a start-up developing digital solutions for physiotherapy.

He has so far visited four continents and more than 30 countries, and drives 35,000 km a year. He has many plans for the future: "I have a biography coming out. If the opportunities unfold in the right direction, I will also be making international appearances."

52 Paralympic medals

So far, Slovenian Paralympians have won 52 medals, 14 of them gold. The most gold medals have been won in shooting, swimming, table tennis and athletics, in which Pavla Sitar won her first gold medal in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1972.

The record holders with six medals each are the athlete Franjo Izlakar and the late sitting volleyball player and swimmer Jože Banfi. The first bronze medal for Slovenia at the Paralympic Games was won by Jože Okoren in the discus throw in 1972.

The most successful Slovenian Paralympians

Who are the most outstanding Slovenian Paralympians to date?

Franjo Izlakar is one of the two most successful Slovenian Paralympians, having won six medals in athletics, three gold, two silver and one bronze. In 1992, he won the first ever (gold) medal under the flag of Slovenia in Barcelona. First he won gold in the shot put and then in the discus throw. He set the world record in the shot put and the Paralympic record in the discus throw.

The Slovenian para-archer Živa Lavrinc, who also competes in the para-bob, needed only one month after the birth of her son last year to qualify for the Paralympic Games, which will take place this year from

28 August to 8 September in Paris.

The 35-year-old with a master's in Sports Management is one of the world's top para-archery athletes. Her first-born Noah has already been with her at the World Archery Para Championships, where she finished in a very respectable 7th place. "The support of my loving partner and the presence of our first child were most important to me. We quickly got used to the new rhythm of life. Of course, it was also helpful that coach Brina believed in me and encouraged us all to go to the competition. My mother also accompanied us to Pilsen and took care of Noah," says Živa, modestly.

In Paris, she wants to achieve her personal best in the qualification rounds and thus be in a good position for the knockout rounds. As far as ambitions are concerned, she is not putting any extra pressure on herself. She believes that the less she burdens herself with thoughts of results, the better it will work out.

"Without sport, there's no life. It's always been a source of energy for me. Sport connects, unites and strengthens us at the same time. It proves that you can push the limits of what's possible. Something that's

considered impossible today can become a reality tomorrow," says Živa, who is in love with sport.

And she is not the only Slovenian Paralympian who inspires and delights with her successes. By the beginning of July, the women's sitting volleyball team, para-archer Dejan Fabčič and para-shooter Franček Gorazd Tiršek had also already qualified for this year's Paralympic Games. The para-cyclist Anej Doplihar, para-athlete Robi Kočovšek and boccia competitor Nataša Bartol were also in the running in early July.

Paralympic ace in the world of entrepreneurship

While Živa Lavrinc fascinates with her will and sporting achievements, Darko Đurić inspires and thrills with his entrepreneurial endeavours after a very successful para-swimming career. He has competed at the Paralympic Games twice, won two World Championship titles in 2013, became world record holder in the 50m butterfly, and won silver and bronze at the 2016 European Championships. In 2011, while still pursuing his sporting career, he started motivational speaking.

"That's when I received my first invitation to present my story to a group of young people. Since then, I have done an average of ten appearances a year. The fact that I have now started to devote even more energy and focus to it is mainly due to the response of the people around me. If I can change



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in the Paradise Valley

Cycling from flavour to flavour

It's not a coincidence that Vipava Valley is considered a cyclist's paradise. The serene setting and oh-so-perfect landscape, the myriad cycling paths, and a cycling season spanning the whole year, cater to cyclists of all ages and skill levels. Beyond that, all cycling trails have a gourmet twist to them.

Wine and cuisine for the gods

Boasting exquisite and very special wines, this region is equally famous for its superb culinary offer which is bound to captivate you with its authenticity. Unique dishes and local hospitality turn a day of outdoor pursuits into the ultimate heavenly experience.



Just one month after giving birth, Živa Lavrinc qualified for the Paralympic Games in Paris.

Jože Banfi took up table tennis, sitting volleyball and swimming quite by chance. He competed in the Paralympic Games no fewer than six times. In 1980 and 1984 he won six medals – three gold, one silver and two bronze. He swam his way to five of them and won one in sitting volleyball with his teammates. At the time, gold medals in swimming also meant world records.

Jože Okoren was the first Slovenian Paralympic medallist in Yugoslavia, in the discus throw (Heidelberg, 1972). He also went on to win a silver medal in the discus throw (Arnhem, 1980). His result was also the European record for several years.

Pavla Sitar won the first Paralympic gold medal in wheelchair track racing (Heidelberg, 1972) for Slovenia (still competing under the Yugoslav flag at the time).

Mateja Pintar won two Paralympic medals, a gold (Athens, 2004) and a bronze (Beijing, 2008). She often says that winning the gold medal was a dream come true, and she is also very proud of her bronze from Beijing.

Veselka Pevec won a gold medal in shooting (Rio de Janeiro, 2016). She is best described by the phrase “she came, she saw, she conquered”. Veselka demonstrated her coolness and calmness on the shooting range.

Franc Komar won Slovenia’s only Winter Paralympic medal, a bronze in Men’s Alpine Combination LW6/8 at the 1984 Winter Paralympic Games in Innsbruck.

Record holder and outstanding team manager

Franc Pinter is the most successful Slovenian para-athlete with the most Paralympic appearances, having competed eight times. He won four medals: three silver (Atlanta, 1996; Sydney, 2000; Athens, 2000) and one bronze (Beijing, 2008).

Polona Sladič is the most successful para-shooting team manager, credited with keeping the Slovenian para-athletes on an impressive championship run. Under her guidance, they have won nine Paralympic



Photo: personal archive

Darko Đurić has started a second career in startups and motivational speaking.

medals at seven consecutive Games: starting in Atlanta in 1996 (Franc Pinter, second place), continuing in Sydney in 2000 (Franc Pinter, second place), Athens in 2004 (Franc Pinter, second place), Beijing in 2008 (Franc Pinter, third place), London in 2012 (Franček Gorazd Tiršek, second place), Rio in 2016 (Veselka Pevec, first place, and Franček Gorazd Tiršek, second place) and Tokyo in 2021 (Franček Gorazd Tiršek second and third place). >>

ENERGY MANAGEMENT FOR INDUSTRY 5.0

Velenje’s Alset transforming industry by thinking outside the box with the help of energy management

At a time when innovation and sustainable development represent the core of business strategy, Velenje-based company Alset has set its sights on advanced and innovative methods that go beyond traditional approaches in energy management. Established in 2015, the company rapidly became a benchmark for the engineering and implementation of complex technological solutions, thanks to fruitful collaborations with well-known industry partners in the field of automation of technological processes. As co-owner Peter Nakov points out, it is time to think outside the box.

Energy management the key to success at the centre of digital transformation

Energy management represents an ambitious digital transformation of the corporate value chain, and Alset plays a key role in the formulation and implementation of energy management strategies. This approach is not only a response to growing energy prices, it is a key component for achieving greater energy efficiency, reducing operating costs and supporting sustainable growth.

Alset’s energy management strategy is based on an accurate energy audit and analysis of existing production processes, the preparation of technical documentation and the deployment

of advanced equipment in order to identify and implement improvements for the optimisation of consumption. Energy self-sufficiency, which includes the use of sustainable sources and storage systems, is an important pillar of energy management strategy.

Alset also understands the key role of smart networks in the future of energy self-sufficiency, despite current challenges linked to high costs. Peter Nakov believes that energy management should be a standardised element of the construction of all new buildings even today.

Skaza 5.0

The Skaza 5.0 product is an example of how Alset contributes to the transformation of energy management in industry using an innovative approach and technical know-how. Energy costs account for 4.7% of the selling price of products made by Plastika Skaza (figures for the 2023 financial year). The project devoted considerable attention to the start-up, shut-down and standby costs of production processes and to the search for optimally efficient production in the sense of planning by different resources and times in individual cells and monitoring of electricity and compressed air consumption and process water cooling. By implementing alternative sources of electri-

city, storage systems and charging systems for electric vehicles, Alset is laying innovative foundations for energy management at Plastika Skaza, leading to new models of energy efficiency. The savings achieved in the Skaza 5.0 project through optimisation, automation and robotisation, combined with efficient energy management, directly contribute to employee satisfaction, personal growth and career development. Employees become operators of automated systems, which improves their job satisfaction and opens up pathways for professional development.

Transition to a greener and more sustainable future

With its clear vision and commitment to innovation, Alset wishes to become a leading provider of innovative technological solutions and a key player in the transition to a greener and more sustainable future. As well as bringing immediate benefits to its customers through its comprehensive and specialised approach to energy management, it is also endeavouring to set standards for the entire industry. Enriched by the experience gained through the Skaza 5.0 project, Alset is now offering its energy management services to other companies, in this way proving that thinking outside the box is the key to innovation and sustainable development.



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New export niche champions

- Where do Slovenia's new fast-growing exporters come from?
- In what niches are they powerful players in European and global markets?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ

Belektron, Valiant, Cablex, Akrapovič, Rastoder, Plasta, Calcit, Don Don, G4 Group, Filc, Incom, and so on. All companies that are today high on the list of Slovenia's biggest exporters. Three decades ago, however, most were still small businesses – or not even that.

The same applies to many names on the list of the fastest-growing Slovenian companies of the last five years: Belektron, Ledinek Engineering, Incom, Bisol Group, Pirnar, Don Don, Plastoform, Valiant, Isokon, REM, Siliko.

The only difference is that the first 11 are among Slovenia's 85 biggest exporters, while the second 11 are among the 25 fastest-growing exporters. This is a perfect illustration of the remarkable dynamics of Slovenia's export sector.

New players are arriving on the scene. New export comets are joining the established stars of Slovenian exports.

Family businesses becoming new export champions

Of the 22 companies listed above, 17 are family-owned. Thirty-three years on from Slovenian independence, they are now among the 200 biggest and 100 fastest-growing companies in the country.

After a quarter of a century as a journalist and employee of business organisations, I keep a close eye on Slovenia's rapidly growing "gazelle" companies, so this comes as no surprise to me. The potential of Slovenia's entrepreneurial sector was already evident 20 to 25 years ago.

Who are these companies? How have so many of them found themselves among the country's biggest exporters?

Following acquisitions in recent years, Roto has become one of the world's leading suppliers of different types of canoes and kayaks.



Photo: Roto Group d.o.o.

The answer: these are the biggest entrepreneurs in Slovenia. Back in February, Podjetna Slovenija magazine, in conjunction with Dun & Bradstreet Slovenija, published Slovenia's first ever ranking of the biggest entrepreneur-owned companies and groups. The results were surprising to say the least.

The incredible rise of Slovenian entrepreneurship

Among Slovenia's 500 biggest companies by sales revenue, 141 were owned by entrepreneurs. That number rises to 189 if we look at the 600 biggest companies.

This means that, just over three decades after independence, almost a third of the biggest companies in Slovenia are owned by entrepreneurs who back in 1991 were still running small businesses out of their garages – or in some cases began their entrepreneurial journeys even later than that. The majority of them are exporters. Because in a small country like Slovenia it is practically impossible to grow so big without exports.

Many of them already employ more than 1,000 people. Not just Akrapovič, the company founded and owned by Igor Akrapovič. There is also the Plasta group, owned by Franc Frelj, the Don Don group owned by Aleš Mozetič and Alenka Mozetič Zavr, and the Cablex group, which owns companies in various parts of the world.

The next finding is even more interesting. Although the majority of Slovenian entrepreneurs who own large firms are still following the path of organic growth, there are quite a number who have already proved themselves to be savvy investors by investing in a wide range of different sectors. Not just the sector they know best.

One example of this is the Plasta group, whose owner Franc Frelj has been investing in a number of different companies in

various sectors for years. Others investing in new projects include Belektron owner Boštjan Bandelj, Izet Rastoder of the Rastoder group, the Gregorčič family's G4 Group and numerous other Slovenian entrepreneurs.

Who are the new export comets?

They can be from anywhere. But they are all part of the same powerful trend. The only rule is enthusiasm for whatever sector they are in, but some of them have become true global niche champions.

Belektron has proved itself among the big players in the emissions trading market. Likewise Valiant in energy trading. Plasta started out as a maker of plastic products but some years ago diversified into the food industry when it acquired a juice factory and an edible oils factory. Don Don has expanded its baking business into south-eastern Europe.

The G4 Group started out in the plastic thermoforming business and now owns companies making, among other things, paper products, skylights, acrylic composites, noise protection, wheels and castors. Cablex is today one of the world's leading system developers and suppliers of wire harnesses.

Akrapovič is the best known maker of car and motorcycle exhaust systems in the world. Calcit is one of the leading producers of calcium carbonate pigments, fillers and granulates in the European market.

Rem plays a major role in the field of complex modular prefabricated structures in Europe and beyond. Ledinek Engineering makes woodworking machines and complete lines. With customers on every continent, it is a player in the global market. Incom sells innovative ice cream products from the United Kingdom to Vietnam: 2.5 million of them a day.



Photo: Arhiv Ledinek Engineering

Gregorja Ledinek's Ledinek Engineering is strongly increasing its exports, occupying in impressive fifth place in terms of export growth in the last five years.



Photo: Barbara Reya

Ivo Boscarol developed the highly innovative ultralight aircraft maker Pipistrel. Following the sale of the company to its new American owners, experts from universities across Europe are coming to work in Ajdovščina.



Photo: archive Dewesoft

Jure Knez and Dewesoft are pioneers in more ways than one. Along with developing systems for NASA, the Trbovlje-based entrepreneur is known for encouraging his employees to become shareholders in the company.



Photo: Barbara Reya

Nuša Pavlinjek Slavinec is a member of the second generation of the Pavlinjek family to head Roto. The company has recently added the Viking and Canadier canoes to its range and now makes the widest selection of these craft in the world.



Photo: archive Don Don

Alenka Mozetič Zavrl and her brother **Aleš Mozetič** have developed the small bakery business Don Don into a powerful regional player.



Photo: archive Belektron

Boštjan Bandelj is one of Slovenia's most successful new entrepreneurs. Having started out in CO₂ emissions trading, he is now investing in new green technologies.

Bisol photovoltaic modules are found in more than 100 countries around the world. Pimar is a global innovator in the entrance door market. Tajfun is one of a number of major Slovenian players in the forestry machinery market. RLS Merilna Tehnika specialises in linear and rotary sensors and encoders.

Kovis is Europe's largest producer of bearing housings for railway goods wagons. Dewesoft develops and manufactures testing and measuring equipment for customers including NASA. Brinox produces unique process equipment, including for the biopharmaceutical industry. KLS develops and manufactures extremely high quality starter ring gears and rings for starter motors and drivetrains.

Sustainable businesses are flourishing

I could list plenty more niche champions from Slovenia, in addition to those that appear in the rankings of the 200 biggest exporters and 100 fastest-growing Slovenian exporters, as found in this magazine.

But there is also another interesting trend. For the last two years, the list of Top 500 SMEs (small and medium-sized Slovenian enterprises) published by Podjetna Slovenija has featured a large number of companies whose activities are closely linked to sustainable trends and technology.

Their potential and performance are most evident in figures on value added per employee. This particular ranking is topped by Belektron, closely followed by Bisol, which makes photovoltaic modules, and Ngen, a company dealing in the modernisation and digitalisation of energy systems.

Exporters are expanding abroad or attracting investors to Slovenia

Entrepreneurship has always served as a regenerator of the economy. New export stars are emerg-

ing alongside existing ones. In the same sector, but always in new niches. They include companies that don't appear in rankings of family businesses because they've already diversified or been sold.

Some have continued the family tradition by dividing their businesses among members of the younger generation. Others have invested heavily in acquiring companies in other countries. So of course they no longer appear on lists of Slovenia's biggest exporters. Prekmurje-based Roto is a case where both these factors apply. As well as developing and manufacturing a range of treatment plants and oil separators, Roto also makes recycled plastic kayaks and canoes. It sells all its products globally – all over the world.

New players are arriving on the scene. New export comets are joining the established stars of Slovenian exports.

Other entrepreneurs have sold their businesses and are now focusing on new investments. One of the best known companies in Slovenia is Pipistrel, formerly owned by Ivo Boscarol, which develops and manufactures ultralight aircraft. Under its new American owners, Textron, the company is continuing to develop its range in Ajdovščina, an enterprise-friendly municipality ranked the most promising in Slovenia from a development perspective. The company's highly specialised workforce is drawn from universities in a 500-kilometre radius of the small Slovenian town of Ajdovščina. >>

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Ranking	Name of the company	Export growth index (2022/2017)	Ranking	Name of the company	Export growth index (2022/2017)
1	Belektron	955.9	12	Riko	142.8
2	Iskra Group	303.2	13	Bisol Group	142.8
3	HSE Group	214.2	14	PIRNAR	138.8
4	Gorenje gospodinjski aparati	196.1	15	Don Don Group	132.7
5	Ledinek Engineering	186.1	16	Metal Rado Snežič d.o.o. Group	124.4
6	Petrol Group	166.2	17	Plastform Group	121.4
7	Cetis Group	156.6	18	Fotona	121.4
8	Intereuropa Group	151.6	19	Perspektiva Group	120.4
9	Incom	148.7	20	Valiant	118.6
10	Odpad	148.4	21	Palfinger proizvodnja	117.1
11	Rondal	145.6	22	Farmtech	114.7

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Ranking	Name of the company	Export growth index (2022/2017)	Ranking	Name of the company	Export growth index (2022/2017)
23	Adria Dom	113.8	62	Plasta Group	67.1
24	Isokon	110.1	63	Pivovarna Laško Union	66.5
25	Rem	108.8	64	Rastoder Group	66.4
26	Siliko	95.6	65	RLS Merilna tehnika	65.8
27	Kolektor Etra	95.4	66	Fenolit	65.6
28	Mahle Electric Drives Slovenija	95.3	67	Lek Group	65.3
29	Bravophone Adria	95.0	68	Trimo Group	65.3
30	Polycom	93.6	69	GEN Group	65.2
31	Seven Refractories	93.5	70	Lukem	63.6
32	Tajfun Group	92.6	71	Finiks	63.6
33	Perutnina Group	92.2	72	Sibo Group	63.2
34	TPV Automotive	90.8	73	Štore Steel	61.8
35	Akton telekomunikacijski inženiring	89.4	74	Medis Intago Group	61.3
36	Elrad International Group	89.0	75	SIJ Metal Ravne	60.3
37	Medis	87.3	76	Kovis	59.6
38	Knauf Insulation	87.2	77	MM Količevo	59.1
39	TPV Group	85.2	78	Fluidmaster	58.9
40	TPG Express	85.2	79	Elan Group	58.3
41	Inotherm	83.1	80	Koncern ETI	58.2
42	Herz	80.9	81	Helios Group	58.0
43	Steklarna Hrastnik Group	76.0	82	Cablex Group	57.7
44	TKK	75.6	83	Ursa Slovenija	57.3
45	Lesonit	73.9	84	Sumida Slovenija	56.4
46	Geberit proizvodnja	73.9	85	H & R Group (Hidiria**)	56.2
47	Imerys Ruše	73.4	86	Bayer	55.9
48	Akrapovič	73.4	87	Salonit Anhovo Group	55.3
49	SIJ Acroni	73.3	88	Frutarom Etol Group	54.1
50	Gostol-Gopan	72.0	89	DSV Transport	53.4
51	Ecolab	71.3	90	LES-MMS Group (Lesnina**)	49.9
52	Dinos	71.0	91	Adria Mobil Group	49.4
53	Intersport Group	70.9	92	Domel	49.0
54	Sigur Retail Group	70.9	93	Ljubljanske mlekarne	47.8
55	Papirus Holding Group	70.1	94	Termoplasti-Plama	47.4
56	Impol 2000 Group	69.7	95	ADK	47.1
57	SIJ Group	69.3	96	Helios	47.1
58	Intersocks	69.1	97	I.P.S. Group	47.0
59	Sandoz Pharmaceuticals	68.9	98	Cablex-M	45.7
60	Interblock Group	68.3	99	Kovintrade Group	45.7
61	Metrel DUS Group	68.1	100	Bosch Rexroth	45.7



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- Wood processing industry
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- Forklift renovation

TYPE	TOS 1	TOS 2	TOS 3	TOS 4	TOS 5	TOS 6	TOS 7	TOS 8	TOS 9	TOS 10	TOS 11	ŠKODA
CNC TOS												
Table:	1800 x 2200	1800 x 2000	1800 x 2500	1800 x 2500	1400 x 1600	1800 x 2500	1800 x 2500	1400 x 1600	1800 x 2500	4 x 3500	1400 x 1600	2000 x 2000
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y:	2000	2000	3000	3000	1600	3000	3000	1600	3000	4500	1600	3000
z:	1250	1250	1600	1600	1250	1600	1600	1250	1600	1200	1250	1600
Maximum load	12.000 kg	12.000 kg	20.000 kg	20.000 kg	8000 kg	25.000 kg	25.000 kg	8000 kg	25.000 kg	80.000 kg	8000 kg	65.000 kg
Spindle diameter:	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 125	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 125	DIA 130 / ISO 50		DIA 125	DIA 160 / ISO 50

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Company in numbers:

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- Producing products up to a total weight of 64 tons
- 15.000 m² modern equipped halls

New acquisitions in 2022 /Green energy

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Adria Kombi offers intermodal connections between more than 70 industrial hubs across Europe. Their range of services is extremely diverse and addresses the needs of a wide variety of customers. They can carry out purely rail transport between terminals or deliver the entire package to the door, including arranging the customs documentation.

“The wide range of services offered allows our customers to know that we are not their competitor at the transport or freight-forwarding level. The core of our offer is to combine rail (long and medium distances) and road (short distances) transport and to utilise the advantages of both,” explains the company’s Managing Director, Janez Merlak.

In this way, the company ensures a positive impact on the environment, minimal energy consumption, highly economical services and the best possible use of the individual transport links.

Adria Kombi is also a loyal supporter of various sporting activities, and of both club and junior teams. Among other things, the company was a major sponsor at the recent ECA Canoe Slalom European Championships in Tacen.

More and more goods will move by rail

Intermodal transport has recently become increasingly important thanks to the green transition. The EU Member States’ commitment to reduce energy consumption by 55% by 2030 and to have a zero-carbon footprint by 2050 is thus forcing operators to change their ways.

“European goods that are now transported on European roads will move by rail in the future, once all the major infrastructure works on the railway network across Europe are completed,” predicts Janez Merlak. “Consumer goods coming into the EU from other continents, especially Asia, are usually already containerised before heading our way, allowing them to be transported across the EU either by truck or by rail,” he adds.

The digitisation of processes and the introduction of new technologies that increase efficiency and reduce costs are also playing an increasingly important role.

More links are planned

Neutrality and diversity of supply are key to the success in intermodal transport. Adria Kombi has consciously developed both over the last 30 years, successfully bringing intermodal transport to a wider range of customers despite an often rather inflexible railway system.



“Sport brings us together, unites us and there’s nothing better than being a piece in the mosaic of the success of Slovenian athletes,” emphasises Director Janez Merlak.

“This way, the benefits of intermodal transport can be used by customers with more freight who need specific solutions, as well as by smaller customers who manage less freight,” says the Managing Director.

The company is expanding its network of connections and introducing new lines every year, and has bold plans for the future. They have already established a connection with Poland in 2024, and hope to run the first trains from Slovenia to Italy in the second half of the year.



MONTER sign of quality!

Interview: Matjaž Han

“Our athletes put Slovenia on the map.”

■ Why athletes aren't the only ones to have done a lot for Slovenia.

■ What niches and sectors are Slovenia's best companies in?

■ Which celebrity with 18 million Instagram followers will soon be coming to Slovenia?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

Matjaž Han is Slovenia's Minister of the Economy, Tourism and Sport. The sports personality he is closest to is Benjamin Šeško, the current star of Slovenia's national football team who this year appeared at the UEFA European Championship in Germany. Both are from the small Slovenian town of Radeče.

What was your favourite sport growing up?

At the local level, I played for a handball club that later became a Slovenian first division team.



“Slovenia is an economically successful country. But it's only when you connect it with Dončić, Pogačar or Roglič that it truly becomes apparent what the Slovenian spirit is capable of.”

You were a handball player but Radeče is better known for football, isn't it?

That's true. Right now, Benjamin Šeško is one of the most exciting young forwards anywhere in the world. He's a player with great prospects and a true ambassador for Slovenia.

Slovenia is sending its biggest team ever to this year's Olympic Games in Paris, including a number of favourites.

Absolutely. We've beaten our previous record of 79 athletes at the Olympics, which for a country of Slovenia's size is a phenomenal result.

Why is Slovenia so successful in sport, given its population of just two million?

There must be something in our genes. There's also the fact that we're very determined to prove ourselves. Slovenian pride plays a big role.

But it's true that we're something of a phenomenon. This is something I've discussed in the past with a lot of sports ministers from much richer countries. They all ask me the same question you've just asked.

And I don't really have an answer. I do know, though, what our athletes have done for Slovenia. And not only our athletes. We also have some very important officials in the world of sport.

Aleksander Čeferin is the current president of UEFA, unquestionably one of the most influential organisations at the global level. Not just in a business and financial sense, but also at the

social level. Football makes the world go round. We also have other officials in important positions. Matej Erjavec is a vice president of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA), Franjo Bobinac is taking on new roles with the International Olympic Committee, and so on. And all these experiences can also be a great opportunity for Slovenia.

Slovenia's business champions are slightly less well known. Partly, of course, because Slovenia is a small country, meaning that we don't have many powerful global corporations making products for end consumers. But we do have a large number of champions in niche B2B segments. What are the sectors in which Slovenia has most business champions?

There are lots of them. To highlight two or three: there's Dewesoft in the space technology field. Another reason why it's important for Slovenia to become a full member of the European Space Agency. That will be a big opportunity for Slovenia. And also for Cosylab and many other companies.

These are companies that are under the radar, and they are global players. This is something we can be extremely proud of. As minister, I always enjoy working with companies like these. I think we're on the right track to making Slovenia not just a country that produces sports champions, but one that is also a global champion in the world of business.

That's just one sector. Other important sectors include pharmacy and the automotive cluster. Akrapovič is already a global success story. And then there's Pipistrel, and so on. The majority of these companies are built on Slovenian know-how. No wonder, then, that a number of major global corporations are opening development centres in Slovenia.

Henkel, for example, opened its biggest development centre in Maribor, Slovenia's second city, in May this year. It has two other development centres, one in Mexico and the other in Portugal. But the biggest one is the one in Slovenia. In the pharmaceutical sector, Sandoz and Novartis are also present in Slovenia with new investments in development centres. The same with Krka, which is Slovenian-owned.

Even German companies are becoming more optimistic when it comes to the business environment in Slovenia. As a country, we have a great opportunity – assuming we know how to take it – to open up even more opportunities for our business enterprise sector through tax incentives and other measures. We are already very competitive in numerous sectors.

Slovenia is attractive thanks to its excellent geostrategic position. It's one of the safest countries in the world, it's sustainably oriented and, something also recognised by other countries, it contains an extraordinary amount of accumulated know-how.

Which are the niches or sectors in which you see the greatest potential in the future?

First of all, pharmacy. This is one of the sectors that is opening up new development projects in Slovenia. Both foreign and domestic companies. Krka, for example, already employs more than 12,000 people around the world.

The second is the automotive industry. If it is capable of a smart technological transformation with the green transition, we have great opportunities to take not one but two steps forward in the global chain. And this helps increase added value.

The third sector with great potential is space technology, which is linked to start-ups. These are three stories that could lead Slovenia on into a bright future.

We also have strong mechanical engineering and processing industries, and of course tourism.

How do you see the future of our many niche champions, which are very diverse?

We need to invest significantly more in innovation and new technologies. More money needs to be devoted to this in the next cohesion policy period. We've already increased these funds by almost half a billion euros. We have the know-how, but this won't be enough without new investments in new know-how and new technologies. This is an area in which all of us in the EU need to compete better with the USA.

America invests, China reproduces and Europe, unfortunately, overregulates. The new European Commission will have to do its part to change this logic. Otherwise, good results will not be forthcoming.

The member states of the EU differ greatly. They have very different views about how Europe should develop. The Scandinavian countries are strongly opposed to state aid. At this moment, Germany and France each have their own view about the development of Europe, of industry, and so on. Nevertheless, I expect that the new European Commission will have to change course somewhat. It will need to be more pragmatic.

“AMERICA INVESTS, CHINA REPRODUCES AND EUROPE, UNFORTUNATELY, OVERREGULATES. THE NEW EUROPEAN COMMISSION WILL HAVE TO DO ITS PART TO CHANGE THIS LOGIC.”

Getting back to sport, in what concrete ways can Slovenian sporting successes at the Olympic Games in Paris help the Slovenian economy?

Slovenia is economically successful because of what it is able to offer. But it's only when you connect it with Dončić, Pogačar, Roglič – and I could keep going with the names of every one of our nearly one hundred Olympians – that it truly becomes apparent what the Slovenian spirit is capable of.

Sport is, of course, an extremely effective form of promotion. In August, for example,

Slovenia will host the farewell match of basketball player Goran Dragić. NBA players with 16, 17, 18 million Instagram followers will be coming to Slovenia to take part in this event. Their media appearances will also promote our “I feel Slovenia” tourism brand. That is why our sports personalities are our best promoters, our ambassadors. They put Slovenia on the map.

What message do you have for present and potential future business partners of Slovenian companies?

Slovenia is a European country. It is one of the safest countries in the world. There is an enormous amount of accumulated know-how in our country. We have the advantage of an excellent geostrategic position. We have many opportunities for further growth and development.

What would you say to potential foreign investors?

Everyone who comes to Slovenia, whether as an investor or as a tourist, or merely by chance, will see the beauty of the country and discover for themselves the opportunities available in our homeland.

And what would you say to professionals and skilled workers who are perhaps considering moving here for work?

One of Slovenia's big advantages, besides salaries, is the quality of life, which is ranked among the best in Europe. We are a small country where in just two hours you can go from skiing in the Alps to swimming in the sea. You can drink the water from practically every tap and fountain. We have good healthcare and a good education system. The opportunities for every foreigner to feel at home in Slovenia are more than I could list.

Last but not least, the European market consists of more than 500 million citizens. From Slovenia you can reach Vienna by road in four hours, Munich in five hours, Rome in six hours, Geneva in nine hours, and so on.

Will you be going to the Olympic Games in Paris?

Yes.

What are you going to see?

I've been invited to the opening ceremony. I'll stay for another two days after that. I'm planning to watch the cycling time trial and perhaps also a handball match.

Naturally, I'm particularly looking forward to the opening of Slovenia House, where we will have the opportunity to show everything that Slovenia has to offer. In both business and sport. >>>



“Companies that are under the radar are global players. This is something we can be extremely proud of.”

“The majority of companies are built on Slovenian know-how. That is why several global corporations are opening development centres in Slovenia.”

From individual stars to winning teams

- Why are the Paris Olympics of historic significance for Slovenia's team sports?
- What's the goal of the Slovenian men's handball team at the Olympic Games? What about the women's team? Do they have a chance to win some medals?
- How did the Slovenian men's volleyball team win their ticket to the Games and what are their Olympic goals?



Foto: Aleš Fevžer

Thoughts of medals in the women's handball team, too

For Ana Gros, Barbara Lazović, Tamara Mavsar, Tjaša Stanko and their teammates, led by Dragan Adžić, these will be the first Olympic Games. With their success in the Neu-Ulm qualifiers, where they qualified for Paris together with the Germans by beating Montenegro and Paraguay, the Slovenian women's handball players added to the success of Zorman's squad. The latter made their way to the Games together with Spain in the Granollers tournament, beating Brazil and Bahrain.

Qualifying for the quarter-finals would at least equal Slovenia's best placing in a major competition, which was eighth place. In the preliminary round between 25 July and 3 August, the team will face Denmark, South Korea, Germany, Norway and Sweden. By the way, even the team manager Adžić has been heard to voice thoughts of medals...

Are they going to show that we are a volleyball superpower?

For the first time in the history of the national volleyball team, the captain Tine Urnaut, Klemen Čebulj, Tonček and Žiga Štern, Alen Pajenk, Jan Kozamernik, Dejan Vinčič and their teammates will be able to dream about Olympic glory in Paris, which is quite incredible considering the outstanding success of this generation in the last decade.

The achievements in major competitions and the recent brilliant victories over volleyball superpowers like France show that this dream is attainable. With these feats, the 2015, 2019 and 2021 European champions, the 2023 EuroVolley bronze medallists and the 2022 World Championship fourth-placed team have secured their ticket to the Olympics via the Nations League and high international rankings.

GREGOR LISEC

The Olympic Games in Paris will be of historic significance for Slovenian team sports. This will be the first time that more than one ball sports team from the country will be staying in the same Olympic Village. Previously only one such team at a time has represented Slovenia at the Games, namely the handball (in 2000, 2004 and 2016) and basketball (in 2021) teams.

This year, for the first time in history, the men's volleyball and men's and women's handball teams will be attending the same Olympics. It is important to note that we are talking about Slovenian teams here, as this country on the sunny side of the Alps has already been represented by individual sportsmen and women playing ball sports at the same Olympics in the past. This was the case with the handball players Rolando Pušnik and Alenka Cuderman, who helped make dreams of gold come true under the Yugoslav flag four decades ago.

Uroš Zorman, who organised the Slovenian handball team's play on the court in Athens and Rio, and who will do it from the bench in Paris, was among those who did not hesitate to admit before departure that he was dreaming of a medal. And why not? The Slovenians have already won them at the biggest competitions, such as silver at the 2004 European Championship held in Slovenia and bronze at the 2017 World Championship in Paris.



Photo: Alamy.com

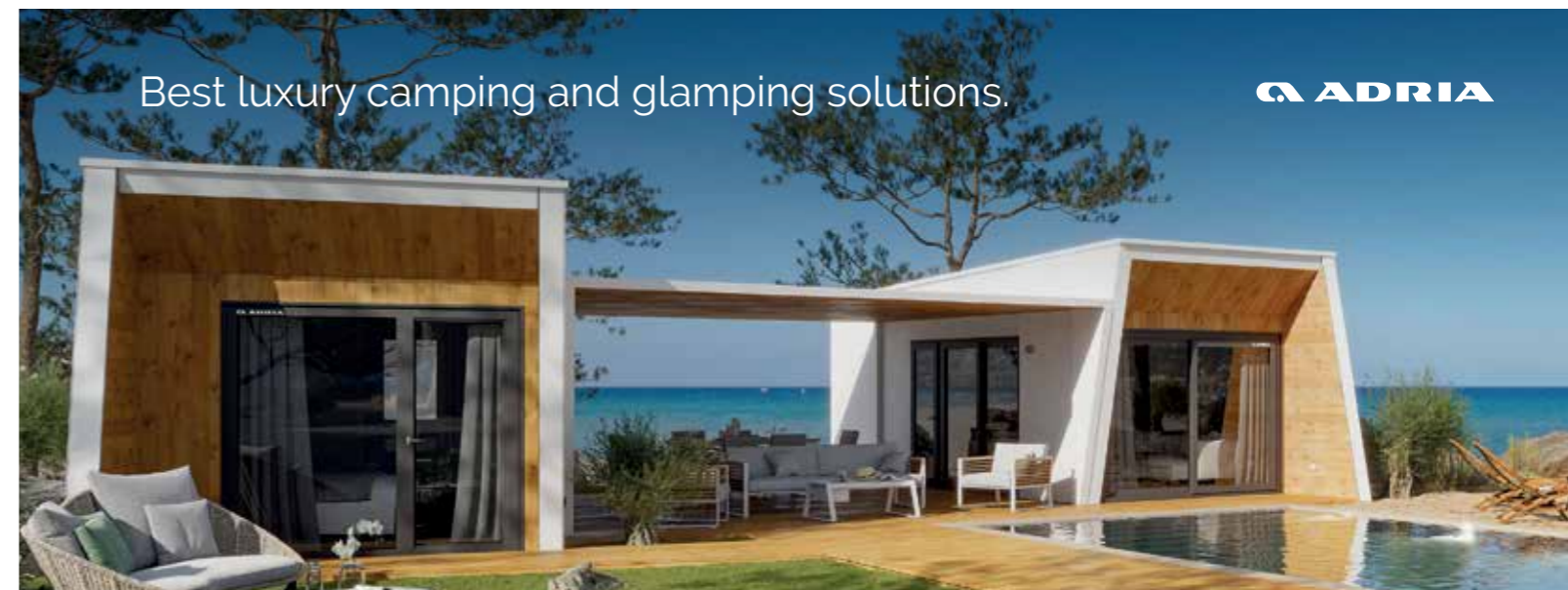


Photo: Alamy.com

For Ana Gros, Barbara Lazović, Tamara Mavsar, Tjaša Stanko and their teammates these will be the first Olympic Games.

At the Olympic tournament, 12 national teams will compete to win one of the three sets of medals, which will be bestowed on 11 August in Lille, where the knockout battles will take place. Slovenia will face Spain, Croatia, Sweden, Japan and Germany in Group A in Paris between 27 July and 4 August for the quarter-finals, where four places are up for grabs.

For a number of Slovenian players, including the captain Jure Dolenc, Dean Bombač, Borut Mačkovšek, Miha Zarabec and Matej Gaber, this will be their last Olympic Games, but not the first for any of them. Nor will this be the first Olympic event for Blaž Janc, Blaž Blagotinšek, Nik Henigman and Urban Lesjak. All of them are determined to take a step forward from their previous experience, when they were denied the chance to fight for a medal in Rio by Denmark.



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Chapter five for an independent Slovenia

Collectively and individually, the Slovenian national teams competing in team sports will write history, which already has several chapters. The first three were penned by the men's national handball team, led by Leopold Jeras, which finished eighth in Sydney 2000. In 2004, Tone Tiselj led them to eleventh place in Athens, while Veselin Vujović took them to sixth place in Rio 2017.

The most recent story with a disappointing ending was written by the national basketball team, with Aleksander Sekulić on the bench and Luka Dončić in the central role. Nicolas Batum blocking Klemen Prepelič in the last seconds of the game, which closed the door to the final on Slovenia in Tokyo, will remain one of the more painful memories in Slovenian sport. It shook the basketball players so badly that they were left without a medal after the match for the bronze against Australia.

Medals were won by Slovenian athletes sporting Yugoslav jerseys

A number of Olympic medals have been won for our country on the sunny side of the Alps by various Slovenian athletes even before the nation became independent. Ivo Daneu and Aljoša Žorga won silver in basketball in Mexico City in 1968, with Vinko Jelovac repeating the feat in Montreal eight years later. In football, Marko Elsner and Srečko Katanec won a bronze medal in Los Angeles in 1984, whereas Alenka Cuderman and Rolando Pušnik won gold in handball at the same Games. Pušnik also won bronze alongside Iztok Puc in Seoul 1988. In addition, Jure Zdovc and Polona Dornik won silver in basketball at the last Olympics before Slovenia's independence.

Naturally, they won these medals as members of the Yugoslav national teams. "In the absence of the Eastern Bloc teams, we came to Los Angeles as favourites, but this was something we had to prove. It was only when we came back with the medals that I realised what we had achieved. This was especially true for me, because at that time nobody said that this would be the first gold medal in Slovenia for women," said Alenka Cuderman, recalling her rise to Olympic glory.

Rolando Pušnik was also part of the Yugoslav delegation in the Olympic Village at that time, and while he didn't get a chance to play in goal at those Games, he did so in Seoul four years later. He also took part in Sidney in 2000, in a jersey featuring the national symbol of Mount Triglav... "That happened much later, so there is a big difference in the whole story. Our expectations were high, even though these were our first Olympics. We didn't win a medal, but eighth place was a pretty good result for Slovenia's handball at that time," the legendary goalkeeper reminisced about his last Olympic experience.

Intergenerational show of support in Paris

Both Olympic handball champions will enthusiastically support the Slovenian national teams at these Games, with Cuderman on the scene in person.

"I will also watch the Olympic Games, including both handball teams, for which I will of course be cheering. It's only natural, as I am a handball player and have spent most of my life playing this sport. I hear that both camps are optimistic, with high goals set and a drive for the maximum performance. And why not? So I wish our players, as well as all other Slovenian athletes, the best of luck," concluded the popular "Puška" ahead of the grand spectacle. >>

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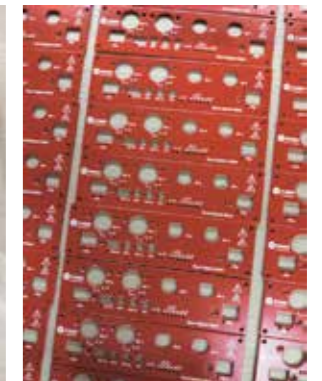
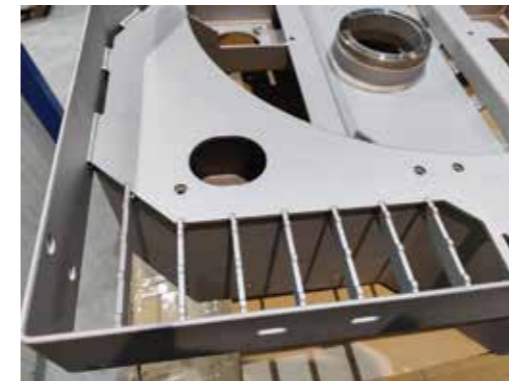
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The company has been extremely successful both at home and abroad. As its key markets are mainly in the EU, it's looking to further expand there in the future and consolidate its position as a key player on the international economic scene.

High-quality metalworking services

Mali-E-Tiko boasts a comprehensive range of metal fabrication and metalworking services: from sheet metal punching and bending to laser cutting.

"We offer punching, bending and a range of other services on CNC machining centres. Welding can also be done robotically, and products can also be electroplated and painted

by our subcontractors," adds Marjan Mali, the company's CEO.

In addition, the firm offers screen printing and UV printing.

The company uses the latest CNC machines equipped with modern 3D modelling and design software. It also has ISO 1090 and ISO 3854 quality certification, as well as ISO 9001 certification, which the company has held for 26 years.

Mali-E-Tiko has a wide range of products and services in the fields of both metal products and electronic components.

The company offers:

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- flattening, laser cutting, punching and bending of sheet metal,
- measuring,
- heatsinks,
- aluminium cases,
- case front panels, handles, wardrobes, firefighting cabinets,
- ground spikes for vertical signage,
- new product development and series implementation,
- custom-made products.

Working with customers throughout the process

One of Mali-E-Tiko's key services is the development of customised products. It works with the customer from the very beginning of the process to ensure that problems are addressed at an early stage, thus preventing the occurrence of any subsequent defects.

"We have a number of designers and technologists in our company who draw up a plan for the product that the customer needs and, after coordination with the customer, the product is realised," explains the company's CEO. Once the product has been successfully developed, the production run is carried out.

Mali-E-Tiko uses state-of-the-art software to plan and execute the projects, and the staff's experience and know-how, which they have accumulated from many successful projects, also plays a significant role in the high levels of quality achieved.

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Interview: Sara Isaković

“It’s a game! Luka Dončić gets his best results when he’s having fun”

- Why was Sara Isaković in tears a few months before winning a silver medal at the Olympics?
- Why is a winning mentality so important in sport and business?
- How does one develop and nurture such a mentality?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

Sara Isaković won an Olympic silver medal in swimming at the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. Now she works as a psychologist and helps build psychological stability in athletes – and also in teams and individuals from the world of business.

Is Slovenia’s Olympic team the strongest ever? Slovenia will also be represented in quite a number of team sports in Paris.

Team sports really do give extra strength to the whole team. At the three Olympic Games I competed in, it was only the handball players who qualified. Having teams qualify for multiple team events is the biggest boost. In the Olympic Village, the athletes socialise and eat in big halls. When a whole team walks into one of those halls, it’s a totally different experience from when individual athletes walk in.

Which of Slovenia’s athletes do you think has the best chance of a medal?

It would be hard to single anyone out. The most important thing at the Olympic Games is that you decide what you’re there for. I’ve worked with Slovenia’s women’s handball team and the Slovenian judoka Kaja Kajzer in the run-up to the Olympics. I say the same thing to all Olympic competitors: you can’t just go to the Olympic Games. Everyone has to decide what they’re going there for.

What do you mean by that?

If athletes don’t decide what they’re going to the Olympics for, they probably won’t achieve a good result. In Slovenia there are still too few athletes who dare to say out loud that they are aiming for an Olympic medal.

For Athens, as a 16-year-old girl, I simply said that I wanted to go to the Olympics. Once I’d

qualified, I had no other goal. I could have been in the final but I wasn’t – precisely because I hadn’t set myself that goal. I didn’t even dare imagine that I could make it to the final. For me, it was enough that I made it to the Olympics.

Our women’s handball team have achieved one goal. They’ve qualified for the Olympic Games. But what now? If they don’t decide what they’re going to Paris for, some other team will make the decision for them and beat them. The whole team has to decide. If 19 players believe and one player doesn’t, there’s no medal.

You’re a former top swimmer who is now a businesswoman and a psychologist. What differences do you notice in yourself?

When I’m giving talks and lectures and I’m with sportspeople, I introduce myself as a psychologist. But they still look at me more as an experienced sportswoman. Of course, I have 16 years of experience and expertise in psychology. But because I have a sporting career like mine behind me, that makes me even more credible in their eyes.

It’s the same when I’m working with businesspeople, pilots, musicians, ballet dancers, whoever. If we’re talking about psychological skills, what’s different is that I’ve already experienced all this in my own career. Even before I started studying psychology. Studying merely consolidated the knowledge I’d gained in my sporting career.

Team sports really do give extra strength to the whole team.



How much do you work with companies, businesspeople, entrepreneurs?

If I have three lectures in a week, two will be for the business community.

What are the parallels and what are the differences when it comes to working with businesspeople and sportspeople?

These two groups actually have an awful lot in common, only in a different context. Athletes and businesspeople both face pressures, expectations and fears, especially when things don't go to plan. They also face anxiety when they find themselves in an unpleasant situation or, for example, a meeting where important deals are being made.

When an athlete is waiting at the starting line, their heart beats faster and their breathing becomes shallower. Tension builds in their body. If they can't find a way to regulate it, they will not achieve the optimal result. In the business world, there are numerous consequences in terms of cognitive capacity, while in sport the effect can be seen, for example, on the timing screens at the end of the pool. Not breathing properly can cost you half a second.

In the business world, an individual might choose not to express an opinion if they are overwhelmed by stress. Instead, they keep quiet and nod, even though they are thinking "No". Some people clam up, others burst out. This frustration can spill over on to employees.

It is more difficult for an athlete to succeed because there is more competition at the very top of world sport. Someone in business can be extremely successful even if they are not at the very top in global terms. On the other hand, it is probably easier to work with athletes, because they are all exceptionally motivated. Businesspeople work with employees whose motivation can vary greatly. What are the differences between athletes and business people when it comes to psychological stability?

In sport, it is easier to face challenges because the whole team – both in individual sports and in team sports – breathe as one. They are a single team. All swimmers love to swim. We're all aiming for the same goal. I remember how, as a team, we won the NCAA (college athletics) championships in the USA three years out of four.

What can the business world learn from this? How can we awake this passion in every individual? How can we implant in them or help them develop their own personal "why", where they ask themselves why they are in this particular business group? What will they contribute? And what are their desires within the common goal? So that it is not only about the job, but about inner motivation too. So that they will fight.

This is very like the situation in sport, except that as athletes we are happy to participate in our sports even as children. We're doing something because we want to. With a job, though, we don't always go to work because we want to.

"Having said that, some runners can pick themselves up after a fall and carry on. Others are no longer the same after a fall, even though they know what their goal is."

Some athletes remain at the top for a long time. Take Novak Djokovic, for example. Others, like Rok Petrović, seem unbeatable but then their form drops off and they never get back to the top. How does one develop a winning mentality and then maintain it?

It's hard, very hard. Especially if someone has other plans in their life, there can also be other priorities. But in essence a winning mentality is what I have already talked about: it's about the athlete knowing where they're going. Why invest so much physical and mental effort? If they don't have a vision of what they want to do with it, they risk losing their way. And that's the end of the story.



Did you use satnav to get here to Radovljica today? Did it bring you to your destination? The brain works in exactly the same way. Our brain is our satnav. When I enter my destination, it will help me reach it. But if we don't put clear instructions into the satnav, we will probably never reach our destination. A winning mentality is a focus on goals.

Having said that, some runners can pick themselves up after a fall and carry on. Others are no longer the same after a fall, even though they know what their goal is.

What is happening there? It's similar to what sometimes happens in companies, isn't it?

Exactly. Along with a focus on goals, it's very important to have psychological skills. These help us face challenges day after day. When I won my silver medal, I hadn't decided in advance what medal I wanted to win. I would have been happy with bronze. I didn't decide that I wanted gold. I didn't dare express that desire. I didn't have that goal.

Of course, people don't know what it was like before that. How in the winter of 2007 I would spend the whole journey in tears as I returned home to Bled from Radovljica after training. Every day. Because I was saying to myself: "Oh my God, there's only eight months left until the Olympics." Back then I needed mental skills to maintain my motivation and strengthen my self-belief. Regardless of the results of the day's training.





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The worst thing is when doubts start to appear, isn't it?

It is important to understand what is actually happening when you struggle to stay at the top. To begin with, the expectations are enormous. For example, after winning 23 Grand Slam titles, why wouldn't Novak Djokovic win another 30? But it isn't that easy.

Your body is different every day. Especially as you get older. It gets harder to get back to the top. Even Djokovic's body is older than it was ten years ago. Re-generation also happens in a slightly different way.

On top of that, there are pressures and expectations – from sponsors, from fans, and so on. You can somehow internalise that. You start to be afraid that you're going to let others down. Your family, your coaches. Doubt creeps in. You start worrying about up-and-coming young competitors.

If an athlete allows doubt to settle in their mind, then it's game over. Everyone always aims to win. Especially top athletes. But you need to approach it differently. No pressure, no expectations. Free, playful, curious. An athlete like that can beat everyone. Why? Because they are unburdened.

What about when you're at the top?

That's when you have to prove yourself. It's harder to maintain good results than to achieve them. You have to believe that you're worth it. But how do you keep proving to the world that you're number one? It gets into your soul and your heart. How do you deal with such pressure?

I help athletes deal with it using hypnosis, visualisations and meditation. To help them clear away these fears and obstacles and be a little more playful as they continue their careers. This also helps them be more creative and relaxed. And make fewer mistakes.

This attitude, this playfulness, also works in a relationship, when spending time with kids. Or in a company. It's the same story. In my work, I'm just trying to take people back to their childhood. I ask basketball players: do you realise you're playing basketball? So play basketball!

It's a game! Luka Dončić is successful because he's having fun. You can see that. Thank goodness he is the way he is and the whole world has the chance to watch someone like that. >>



Experience unforgettable moments in the heart of Kozjansko

In the historical ambience of Podsreda Castle, every day is a new fairy tale. The muted murmur of the ancient castle walls, imbued with tales from their rich history, is joined by the sounds of the unspoilt nature of Kozjansko Park, inviting you to immerse yourself in nature, culture and authentic experiences, excellent local cuisine and forgotten customs as you discover Podsreda Castle and the surrounding area as a destination characterised by extraordinary natural beauty and green practices.

Morning at the castle begins with a breakfast basket filled with good things from the surrounding farms. You can enjoy it in your apartment or room, or take the basket outdoors and set off for a country picnic in the unspoilt natural surroundings of the castle, either on foot or by bicycle.

Kozjansko is criss-crossed with hiking and cycling trails that make the area perfect for an active getaway. A wide selection of themed trails and routes of different kinds offer something for every hiking or cycling enthusiast and all who enjoy spending time in beautiful natural surroundings in pleasant company: for everyone who believes that life is better when you spend at least some of it in hiking boots or in the saddle.

One of the most beautiful walks in Kozjansko Park is the interactive Podsreda Castle Trail, which begins in the medieval market town of Podsreda, passes Levstik's Mill on the river Bistrica and continues through the forest to Podsreda Castle.

The Forest Footpath to Vetrnik (708 m) starts in the market town of Kozje and joins the Travnik Nature Trail just below the summit. Enjoy the gentle sounds of the wind harp at the viewpoint on Vetrnik, which offers wonderful views over Kozjansko Park, a "love bench" and a telescope. There is also a real treasure here: a dry meadow where, in late spring and summer, you can find more than 50 plant species per square metre.

The Podsreda Footpath follows old paths and tracks in the area around Podsreda and links important elements of cultural and natural heritage. To walk along this footpath is to enter a web of rivers and streams, mills, rare habitats, castles, churches, forests, important historical figures, interesting natural phenomena, legends, gullies, past ways of life, old orchards and local inhabitants.

Many more such trails exist in the surroundings of Podsreda Castle for visitors to discover.

Spend the night as the lord or lady of the castle, enjoy the silence of the castle walls and experience the beauty of the unspoilt nature of Kozjansko Park.



LEK VETERINA – with passion for animal welfare we care for people!

Lek Veterina is in animal nutrition sector, a part of business that is raising animals for food. It is not trendy to be part of this sector today, but the fact remains: we work for people.

We need to feed more and more people, which is why there is a constant pressure to create products that give the best result.

Lek Veterina is a part of this sector, working for people with being committed to create best products for animals. At Lek Veterina we are developing products that help improve animal health in a sustainable and nature-friendly way. We innovate and look for solutions that ensure a balanced animal diet, health and well-being, thus ensuring a healthy aspect in the human diet too. The efficiency, quality and safety of our products are a commitment to all our stakeholders.

As one of the most innovative companies in the field of animal nutrition in Slovenia, Lek Veterina strives for partnership with both domestic and foreign business partners. Our passion for animal and human health is transmitted through our products all over the world as we believe caring for animals also means caring for people.

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For more information visit
www.castlepodsreda.com and
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When the sky is the limit!

- Can you imagine a helicopter taking you fishing around Slovenia?
- What's it like cycling through 350-year-old tunnels on a mountain bike downhill trail?
- What does food taste like 160 metres underground?

NINA SIMIĆ



Photo: Jan Godec, Mediaspeed / slovenia.info

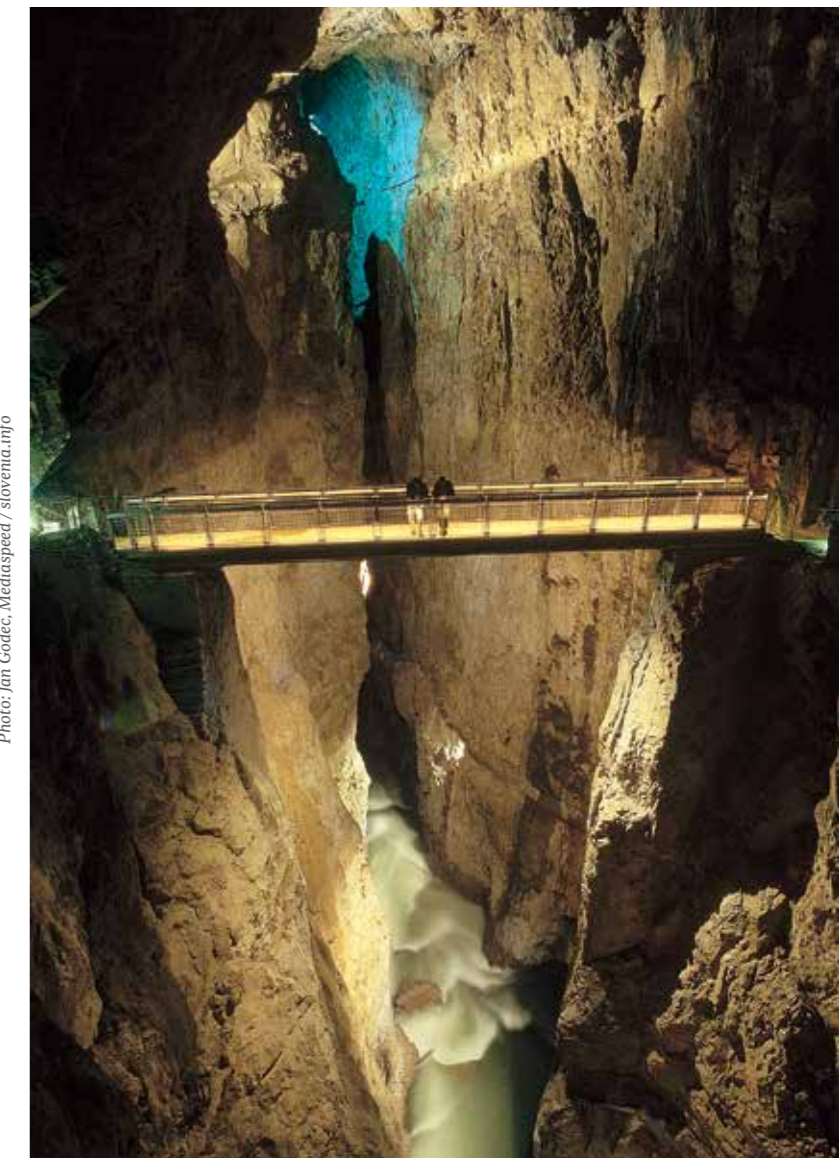


Photo: Borut Lozej, Škocjan Caves Public Service Agency archive / slovenia.info



Photo: Sergej Kepavski, STO / slovenia.info

“Slovenian tourism is following the common vision of Slovenia as a green boutique destination. Boutique tourism is typically aimed at a smaller number of

guests with higher incomes who want an individual approach, a special experience that will remain in their memory for a long time, and a tourism product with high added value,” explains Martina Gojkošek, Head of Corporate Communications at the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO).

Matej Valenčič of Luxury Slovenia DMC, a company that prepares special experiences for affluent and business travellers visiting Slovenia, believes that a perfectly organised service with a high level of privacy and comfort is desirable. “The emphasis is on discretion and bespoke tailoring of the experience from the very first moment they contact us, with a high quality of service and attention to detail,” Valenčič adds.

We checked what Slovenia really has to offer and selected five unusual experiences that are available – the first three were found with the help of slovenia.info and the last one was suggested by Valenčič, whose company organises the experience.



Photo: Mitja Kobal, Karat Film / slovenia.info



Photo: Tanja Verboten



Kavčnik Homestead



Museum of the leather industry in Slovenia



VELENJE CASTLE, FAMOUS FOR BEING ONE OF THE BEST PRESERVED CASTLES IN SLOVENIA, IS THE HOME OF VELENJE MUSEUM

Velenje Museum the territory of the three municipalities in Šalek Valley (Velenje, Šoštanj and Šmartno ob Paki) and offers visitors to Velenje Castle the opportunity to view thirteen permanent museum and gallery collections and an ever-changing programme of fascinating temporary exhibitions. Along with the collections that

accompany visitors through the history of the local area, it is worth highlighting the African collection of František Foit, which is one of the three most important African collections in Slovenia, the collection of mastodon remains and the contemporary Slovene art collection.



Velenje Museum, Ljubljanska cesta 54, 3320 Velenje, Slovenia

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1. Fish & Fly Trio

A special three-day experience for lovers of fly-fishing, pristine nature and clean rivers, with local cuisine and an unforgettable adventure – a helicopter flight over the most picturesque parts of Slovenia, over the mighty Alps to the Soča River Valley.

Accompanied by experienced local fishing guides, you can embark on a three-day fly-fishing adventure, where you will face a threefold challenge: to catch three indigenous fish species in three days – a grayling in the Kolpa River, a river trout in the Krka River and a marble trout in the Soča River. You will be able to take a break by the river every day to taste authentic homemade and homegrown delicacies from the best local suppliers. You'll fly by helicopter from one fishing destination to another, and enjoy the view of one of the greenest lands in the world.

2. Mountain biking down an underground cave

The underground world of Mount Peca offers several fascinating experiences, which include exploring the tunnels on an authentic mining train or even by bike or kayak. Adrenaline enthusiasts will undoubtedly find the mountain-bike downhill trail called the Black Hole the most inviting.

The trail leads through the abandoned tunnels of a lead and zinc mine that is more than 350 years old and has been preserved in its authenticity. The trail descends about 150 metres and is suitable for seasoned cyclists. The experience takes three to four hours. For those less keen on cycling, a visit to the underground by kayak might be more appealing and takes four to five hours.

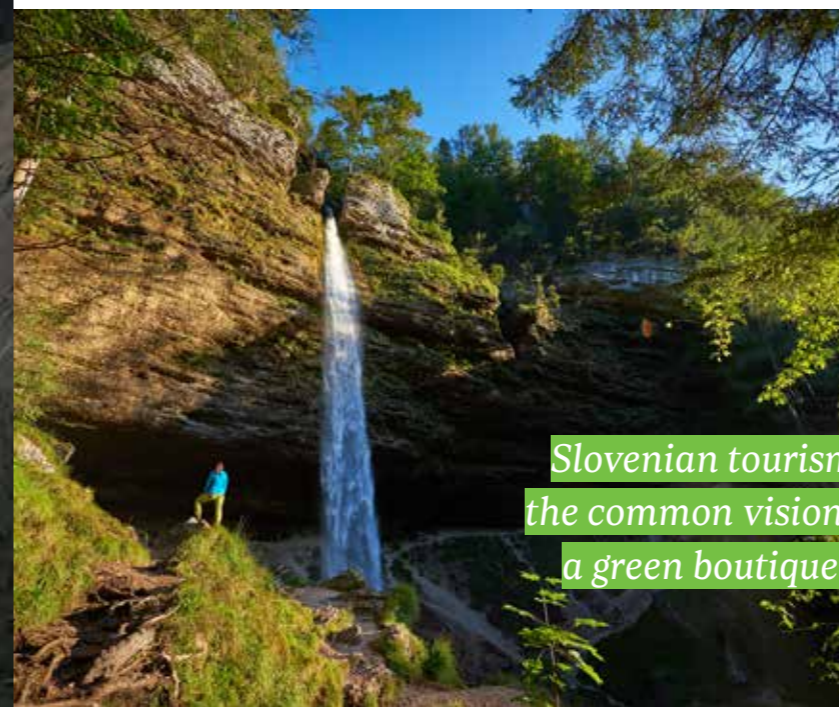
3. Dinner in the Velenje underground

Experience a world-class gastronomic adventure in Slovenia's deepest dining room in the Velenje Coal Mine. Take the oldest operating lift in Slovenia for a three-hour experience in the country's deepest dining room, located 160 metres below surface, where the four-course "Štajgerova južna" meal (the word "štajger" meaning "a mining foreman") awaits you.

Accompanied by music and entertainment, you will engage all your senses to taste the finest culinary masterpieces that are modern versions of dishes that used to sustain miners. After dinner and a ride in the underground train, a glass of champagne awaits you in the mine's Black Changing Room.



Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik, Podzemlje Peca, d. o. o. / slovenia.info



Slovenian tourism is following the common vision of Slovenia as a green boutique destination.

Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik / slovenia.info



Photo: Mitja Kobal, karata Film / slovenia.info

4. School of survival in nature

Would you have the knowledge and skills to fend for yourself in the middle of the great outdoors without the usual tools and necessities of life? The Medo Nature and Sports Lovers' Association, where the Laris Survival School is organised, collaborates with various associations in the Bloke area and offers many different courses for adventurers.

Professional and experienced instructors will teach you basic skills such as making a fire, foraging for food and water, building a shelter, navigation, first aid, game tracking, spotting large carnivores, identifying edible plants and much more. You can become a master of outdoor survival!

5. Cooking workshop with Irena Fonda

The renowned chef Irena Fonda leads an exclusive workshop where guests learn how to prepare fresh seafood dishes using fish from her own farm. The workshop takes place in an idyllic setting by the Slovenian coast and offers a first-hand insight into the secrets of fine dining.

All ingredients are included, as well as one-on-one mentoring by Irena Fonda and tasting of the prepared dishes, rental of a luxury chauffeur-driven car, round-trip transportation from any location in Slovenia and organisation of the experience.



Photo: Jaka Arbutina, Mediaspeed / slovenia.info



Photo: Albin Bezjak, Ptuj Tourism Office / slovenia.info

And what can Alma, the new Virtual Tourist Assistant, help you with?

Alma is a virtual travel advisor who speaks seven languages and was named after the famous Slovenian world traveller Alma M. Karlin. Based on ChatGPT technology, Alma can help you find information and inspiration for your next trip around Slovenia.

She is full of ideas for remarkable experiences, knows Slovenian destinations and activities well and offers personalised content and inspiring stories available on the official tourism portal slovenia.info and more than 50 carefully selected and verified websites of Slovenian tourist destinations and providers.

As the Slovenian Tourist Board explains, you can talk to Alma and tell her what you want. As a point of interest, we asked Alma about five of the luxury experiences you can enjoy in Slovenia and she suggested the following:

- Private wine tours
- Gourmet dinners in secret locations (such as various mansions and castles with renowned chefs)
- Luxury wellness pampering in wellness centres or spas
- Sailing on the Adriatic Sea (from Koper or Piran)
- Helicopter flights over Slovenia



Photo: Jošt Gantar / slovenia.info

Welcome to Slovenia! >>



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On the doorstep of Slovenia's Alpine and Mediterranean world, eight destinations are linked by shared values, traditions and culture.

The people of the Julian Alps protect high peaks, wild waters, forests, pastures, glacial lakes, the living world and the cultural features of this part of the world. This area is home to the largest permanent lakes and the highest mountains, the deepest karst cave, the source of Slovenia's longest river.

We live in the UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme area in Slovenia, the heart of which is Triglav National Park. Everything here is near and almost everything accessible. Here we have peace that we love sharing with the people who visit us.

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Ljutomer – the heart of Prlekija

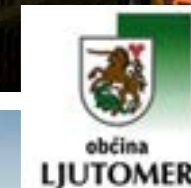
The municipality of Ljutomer, a green destination, invites you to take a break in the heart of the beautiful Prlekija region, which is located in the north-eastern part of Slovenia.

The local cuisine, the hospitable and kind-hearted people, the vast fields of grain and vineyards offer you an experience of a true little paradise. As the cradle of horse breeding, with abundant thermal springs, natural beauty, wind rattles, storks and a rich cultural tradition, it's a real treasure for discovering new experiences.

It is a place of inspiration and relaxation for all visitors, while tasting the noble wines of Prlekija and the local cuisine.

We invite you to Slovenia, to Prlekija, and to Ljutomer, to discover the rich history of our town, to get to know the cultural and natural heritage, to enjoy the beauty of unspoilt nature and, above all, to get a taste of the authentic Prlekija countryside and its tourism

From Ljutomer, a path curves its way through the vineyards towards Jeruzalem – a special sacred place that takes everyone's breath away with its magnificent vistas. The winding terraced hills, the wine road along which the grapes for the finest white wines grow, the beautiful pilgrimage church and the special energy of the ley lines all contribute to the magical atmosphere behind the name of this heavenly place.



SPAS

Any season is right for pampering yourself in thermal waters and saunas, whether in one of the biggest spas in this part of Europe or in smaller, boutique resorts that recharge your energy and offer relaxation for body and mind.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The castles of the Posavje region tell stories of the past. Wander through picturesque villages and discover a rich heritage that will fascinate all lovers of history, culture and art.

CUISINE

A varied landscape, a pleasant natural environment, and excellent local cuisine (from garden to plate). Hospitable locals offer unique gastronomic experiences. Visit wineries to taste local wines and prestigious vintages. Discover the local specialty, repnice, a pit dug in quartz sand, and indulge yourself in unforgettable culinary treats.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Kayaking, canoeing, rafting and fishing – among the many ways to relax on or by the Sava and Krka rivers. The latter also offers natural bathing areas. Cycling, hiking, horse riding and other activities offer plenty both for adrenaline seekers and for those who simply want to relax.



Welcome to Posavje, for unforgettable experiences and lasting memories!



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Hotel Bioterme is the first sustainable hotel in the northeast of Slovenia, set in a relaxing and peaceful location. It holds the EU Ecolabel, the Slovenia Green Accommodation certificate, and is part of the national Green&Safe programme, all signs that the hotel is committed to responsible, sustainable and safe behaviour in tourism.

The natural and peaceful environment of the hotel and the wide range of services on offer can increase creativity, reduce stress and promote a positive atmosphere. Together, these qualities guarantee that your event will be successful, and your business decisions will be the right ones!

Three halls (for 150, 65 and 35 people, with a cinema layout) are available, all with up-to-date technical equipment, while two smaller rooms are also available for smaller workshops and meetings. With the support of our trusted service providers, it is also possible to organise team building events and parties. The activities that take place can be complemented by a wide selection of drinks and snacks, as well as buffet lunches/dinners and culinary indulgences that will fully satisfy your taste buds and appetites.

During their stay, event participants are free to use the services in the thermal park, including the fitness centre and sauna, as well as joining any special activities, while use of a bathrobe and covered parking are also included in the price. For an extra fee, both classic and Ayurvedic massages are also available to help you relax after a hard day's work or play, and the friendly staff are always ready to make you feel at home.

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www.bioterme.si



100 years since first Slovenian Olympic gold medal

■ This year Slovenia is celebrating the centenary of its first Olympic gold medal. It was won exactly 100 years ago by Leon Štukelj at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

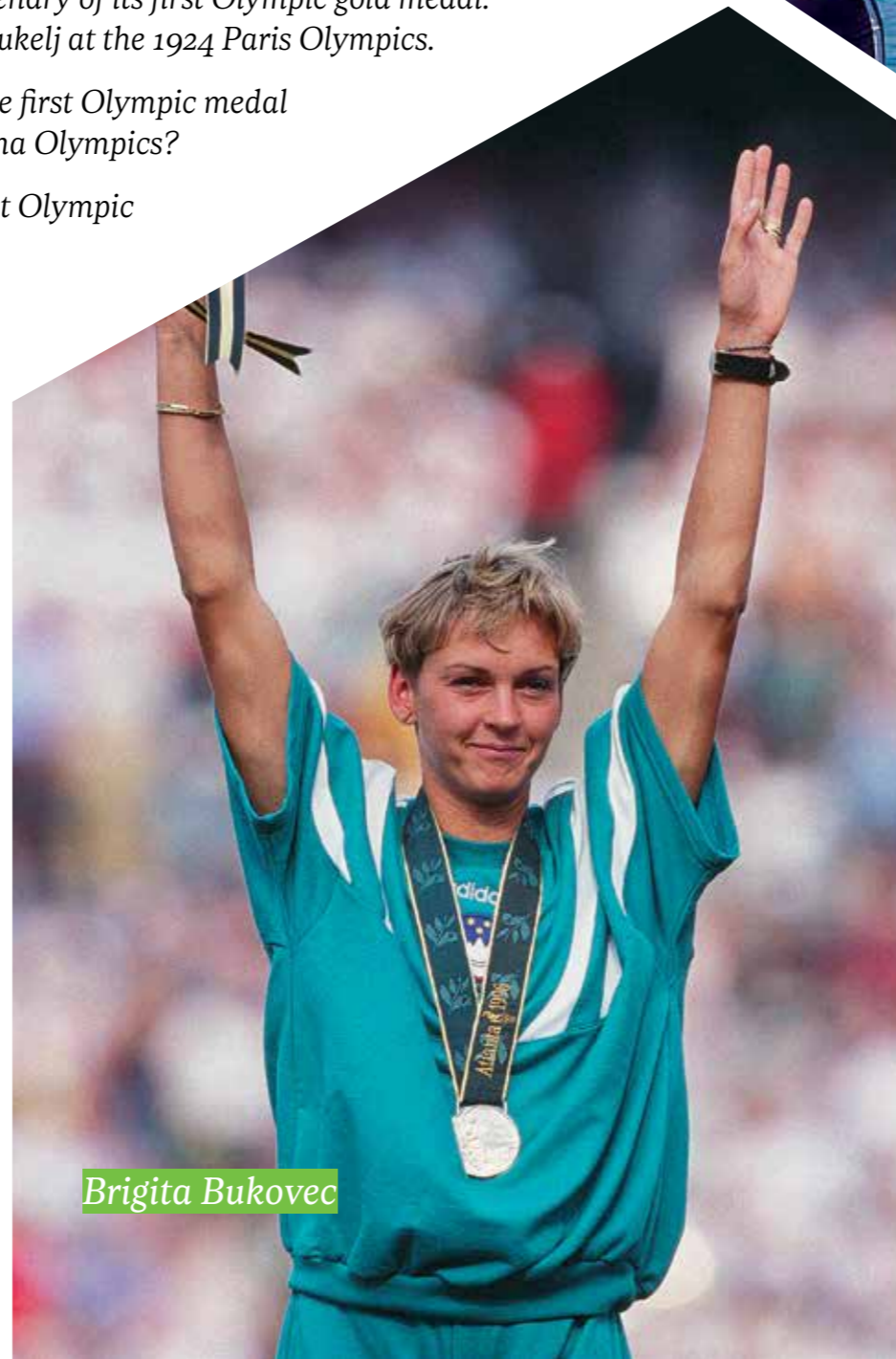
■ Which two Slovenian sports stars won the first Olympic medal under the Slovenian flag at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics?

■ And who won independent Slovenia's first Olympic gold medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics?

TOMI ŠUJDOVIĆ

Many foreigners who are unfamiliar with Slovenia ask in astonishment how it is possible that a country with a population of just over two million is able to produce so many elite sportsmen and sportswomen. The evidence is there to see on the front pages of newspapers all over the world, when they write about Slovenian heroes like Tadej Pogačar, Janja Garnbret, Anže Kopitar, Luka Dončić, Benjamin Šeško, or the achievements of country's cyclists, basketball players, volleyball players, alpine skiers, and so on.

None of this, however, is a mere flash in the pan. Slovenia's athletes have been winning medals and racking up impressive results for a long time. It seems that sport is something we have in our genes. When it comes to the Olympic Games, it is immediately evident that the history of Slovenian successes is very rich and diverse.



Brigita Bukovec



Luka Špik and Iztok Čop



Leon Štukelj

Leon Štukelj, the greatest of all

Over the course of the history of the Olympic Games of the modern era, Slovenian athletes have won a total of 48 medals at the Summer Olympics: 14 gold, 17 silver and 17 bronze.

The first Slovenian name that comes to mind when talking about Olympic medals is that of the gymnast Leon Štukelj, who also holds the record for the most medals won. He won his first medal in Paris in 1924. Now, exactly one hundred years later (1924–2024), the Olympic Games are returning to Paris, a happy coincidence that coincides with Slovenia's celebration of the centenary of its first Olympic gold medal, won by a legendary Slovenian gymnast.

The Novo Mesto native earned his place in Slovenian and global sporting history with two gold medals (all-around and horizontal bar) at the 1924 Olympics as a member of the Yugoslav team. He went on to win a total of six Olympic medals (three golds, a silver and two bronzes) over the course of his career.

After Leon Štukelj, another outstanding gymnast who deserves to be mentioned is Miro Cerar, whose achievements have likewise gone down in sporting history. He won three Olympic medals (two golds and a bronze). Štukelj and Cerar were pioneers of Slovenian sport and the inspiration for numerous subsequent generations of athletes.

But Štukelj and Cerar were not the first Slovenian competitors to conquer an Olympic medal. That honour goes to Rudolf Cvetko, who won silver in the team sabre event at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm, as part of the Austro-Hungarian team.

Barcelona 1992: the first (bronze) milestone marking Slovenian independence

An important milestone in Slovenia's Olympic history is, of course, the period in which Slovenia became an independent country. Slovenian athletes got the opportunity to appear under the Slovenian flag for the first time at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona.

Rowers Iztok Čop and Denis Žvegelj took bronze in the men's coxless pairs event, thereby securing the first Olympic medal for independent Slovenia. Their achievement was then replicated by the men's coxless four, consisting of Milan Janša, Sadik Mujkić, Jani Klemenčič and Sašo Mirjanič. Slovenia's athletes thus returned home from Barcelona with two medals, both bronze.

The 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta hold a special place in the history of Slovenian sport. It was there, on American soil, that hurdler Brigita Bukovec won Slovenia's first Olympic medal in an individual discipline – and Slovenia's first women's Olympic medal.

The Ljubljana-born athlete came second in the 100 metres hurdles, missing out on gold by one hundredth (!) of a second. She was beaten in a photo finish by the Soviet-born Ludmila Engquist, competing for Sweden, who took the gold, while Slovenia's 26-year-old hurdler had to settle for silver.

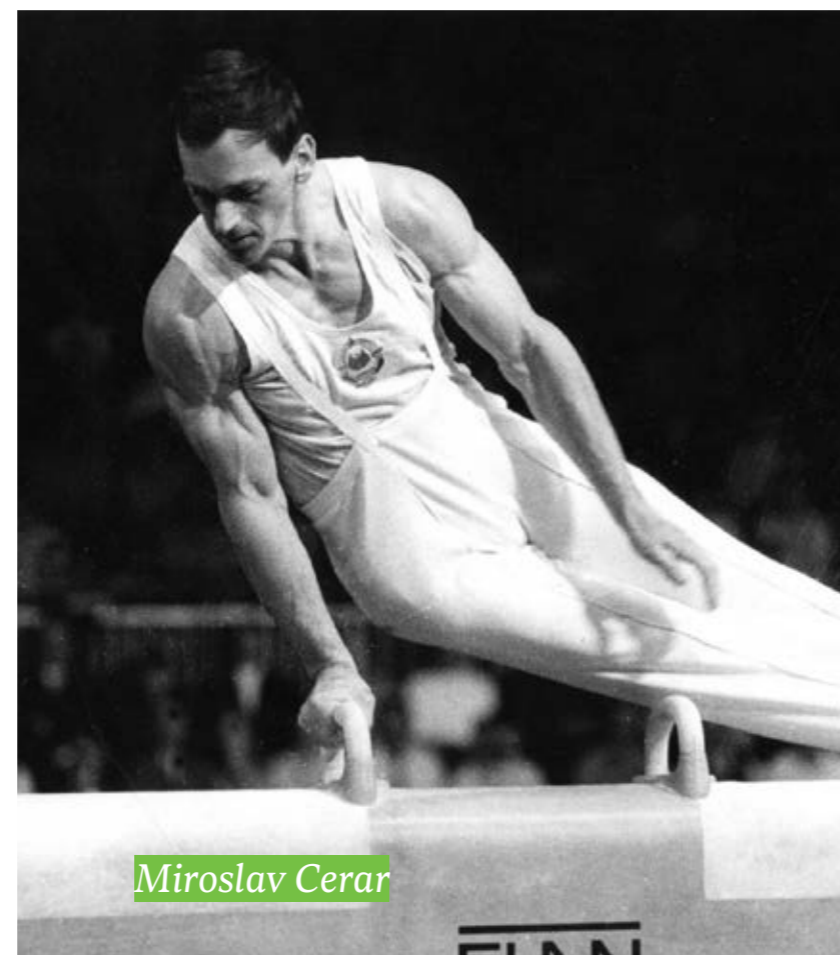
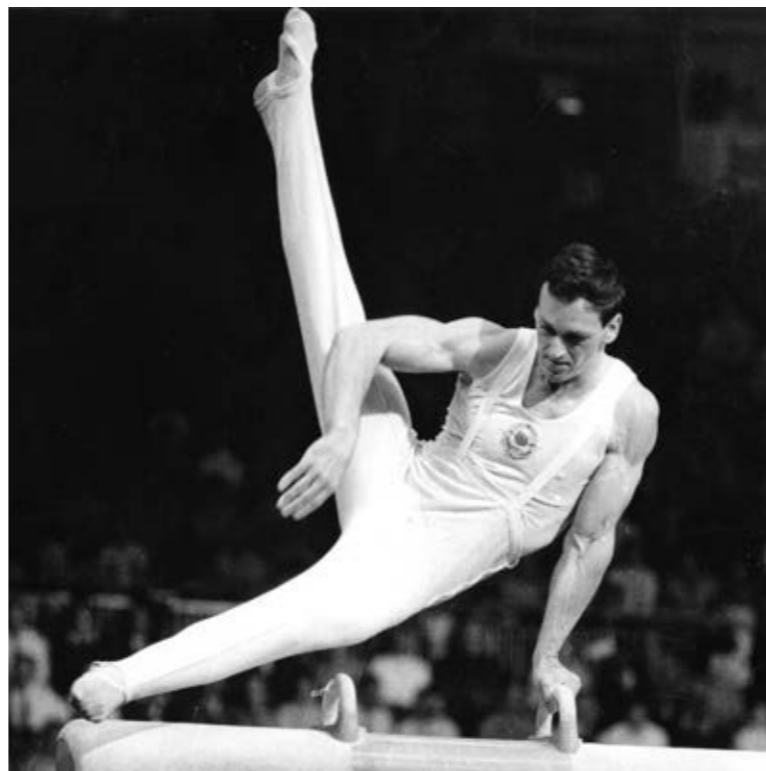
Slovenia's other medal at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta was won by the canoeist Andraž Vehovar, who took silver in the Men's K1 Kayak Slalom Singles. Another Olympic Games with a haul of two medals, this time both silver.

Sydney 2000: rowing pair win independent Slovenia's first gold

Slovenia's rowers were also responsible for bringing home the nation's first Olympic gold as an independent country. For that reason, 23 September 2000 will always be remembered as a golden moment for Slovenian sport. Four years after Atlanta, Iztok Čop and Luka Špik got to hear the Slovenian national anthem played to mark their victory in the double sculls event at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

Considered the best rowing duo in the world at that time, they were also the favourites for Olympic glory. They led from the start in the final and scored a convincing victory. That same day, the Slovenian sport shooter Rajmond Debevec took gold in the 50 metre rifle three positions event. The third Olympic Games for independent Slovenia once again resulted in two medals, this time gold.

As for Čop and Špik, Slovenia's rowing duo extended their run of successful Olympic appearances with a silver medal in Athens (2004) and a bronze in London (2012), in this way completing their medal haul with one of every colour.



Štukelj and Cerar were pioneers of Slovenian sport and the inspiration for numerous subsequent generations of athletes.

At Tokyo 2020, the last Summer Olympics (which actually took place in 2021), five Slovenian competitors returned from Japan with a medal around their necks: three golds (Janja Garnbret in sport climbing, Primož Roglič in cycling, Benjamin Savšek in canoeing), one silver (Tina Trstenjak in judo) and one bronze (Tadej Pogačar in cycling).

Trstenjak's medal was Slovenia's sixth medal in judo, making judo the second most successful Slovenian sport at the Summer Olympic Games, immediately after gymnastics. This was Tina Trstenjak's second Olympic medal after the gold she won in Rio de Janeiro. Another Slovenian judoka to have won two Olympic medals (gold and bronze) is Urška Žolnir, currently employed by the Slovenian Olympic Committee.

Paris 2024: a new opportunity for Slovenian triumphs

After an absence of 100 years, the Olympic Games return to the French capital. This year Paris will be hosting the finest athletes from all over the world, including a large Slovenian delegation. Even more significant than the size of the team is the fact that Slovenia is among the favourites in a range of sports, not only in individual disciplines but also in team events.

Everything looks set for a continuation of Slovenia's Olympic fairy tale, with new achievements and medals. May our national anthem *Zdravljica* ring out as many times as possible in Paris's Olympic venues. >>

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Veliki sponzorji



Sponzorji



Glavni medijski sponzor



pariz2024.olympic.si

Slovenian OLYMPIC MEDALS

48 medals at the Summer Olympic Games

A list of all Slovenian Olympic medals won to date (including those won by Slovenes before Slovenia became independent)

Stockholm 1912 

Rudolf Cvetko – silver (sabre, team)

Pariz 1924 

Leon Štukelj – gold (gymnastics, horizontal bar)
Leon Štukelj – gold (gymnastics, all-around)

Amsterdam 1928 

Leon Štukelj – gold (gymnastics, rings)
Jože Primožič – silver (gymnastics, parallel bars)
Edvard Antosiewicz, Stane Derganc, Boris Gregorka, Anton Malej, Janez Porenta, Jože Primožič, Leon Štukelj – bronze (gymnastics, all-around, team)
Leon Štukelj – bronze (gymnastics, all-around)

Berlin 1936 

Leon Štukelj – silver (gymnastics, rings)

Tokyo 1964 

Miroslav Cerar – gold (gymnastics, pommel horse)
Miroslav Cerar – bronze (gymnastics, horizontal bar)

Mexico 1968 

Miroslav Cerar – gold (gymnastics, pommel horse)
Aljoša Žorga, Ivo Daneu – silver (basketball, team)

Montreal 1976 

Vinko Jelovac – silver (basketball, team)

Los Angeles 1984 

Alenka Cunderman – gold (handball, team)
Ronaldo Pušnik – gold (handball, team)
Marko Elsner, Srečko Katanec – bronze (football, team)

Seoul 1988 

Polona Dornik – silver (basketball, team)
Jure Zdovc – silver (basketball, team)
Iztok Puc, Ronaldo Pušnik – bronze (handball, team)
Sadik Mujkić, Bojan Prešeren – bronze (rowing, coxless pairs)

Barcelona 1992 
(Slovenia's first Olympic Games as an independent nation)

Iztok Čop, Denis Žvegelj – bronze (rowing, coxless pair)
Milan Janša, Janez Klemenčič, Sašo Mirjanič, Sadik Mujkić – bronze (rowing, coxless four)

Atlanta 1996 

Brigita Bukovec – silver (athletics, 100 m hurdles)
Andraž Vehovar – silver (canoeing, slalom K-1)

Sydney 2000 

Iztok Čop, Luka Špik – gold (rowing, double sculls)
Rajmond Debevec – gold (shooting, 50 m rifle three positions)

Athens 2004 

Iztok Čop, Luka Špik – silver (rowing, double sculls)
Vasilij Žbogar – bronze (sailing, Laser)
Urška Žolnir – bronze (judo)
Jolanda Čeplak – bronze (athletics, 800 m)

Beijing 2008 

Primož Kozmus – gold (athletics, hammer throw)
Sara Isaković – silver (swimming, 200 m freestyle)
Vasilij Žbogar – silver (sailing, Laser)
Lucija Polavder – bronze (judo)
Rajmond Debevec – bronze (50 m rifle three positions)

London 2012 

Urška Žolnir – gold (judo)
Primož Kozmus – silver (athletics hammer throw)
Rajmond Debevec – bronze (50 m rifle three positions)
Iztok Čop, Luka Špik – bronze (rowing, double sculls)

Rio de Janeiro 2016 

Tina Trstenjak – gold (judo)
Vasilij Žbogar – silver (sailing, Finn)
Peter Kauzer – silver (canoeing, slalom K-1)
Klementina Ana Velenšek – bronze (judo)

Tokyo 2020 

Primož Roglič – gold (cycling, time trial)
Benjamin Savšek – gold (canoeing, slalom C-1)
Janja Garnbret – gold (sport climbing, combined)
Tina Trstenjak – silver (judo)
Tadej Pogačar – bronze (cycling, road race)

Medals at the Summer Olympic Games by sports

Gymnastics	10	5	2	3
Judo	6	2	1	3
Handball	3	2	0	1
Athletics	4	1	2	1
Canoeing	3	1	2	0
Rowing	6	1	1	4
Basketball	4	0	4	0
Shooting	3	1	0	2
Cycling	2	1	0	1
Sailing	3	0	2	1
Swimming	1	0	1	0
Sport climbing	1	0	1	0
Fencing	1	0	1	0
Football	1	0	0	1

28 medals at the Winter Olympic Games

A list of all Slovenian Olympic medals won to date (including those won by Slovenes before Slovenia became independent)

Sarajevo 1984 

Jure Franko – silver (alpine skiing, giant slalom)

Calgary 1988 

Mateja Svet – silver (alpine skiing, slalom)
Matjaž Debelak, Miran Tepeš, Primož Ulaga,
Matjaž Zupan – silver (ski jumping, large hill, team)
Matjaž Debelak – bronze (ski jumping, normal hill)

Lillehammer 1994 

Alenka Dovžan – bronze (alpine skiing, combined)
Katja Koren – bronze (alpine skiing, slalom)
Jure Košir – bronze (alpine skiing, slalom)

Salt Lake City 2002 

Damjan Fras, Robert Kranjec, Primož Peterka,
Peter Žonta – bronze (ski jumping, large hill, team)

Vancouver 2010 

Tina Maze – silver (alpine skiing, super-G)
Tina Maze – silver (alpine skiing, giant slalom)
Petra Majdič – bronze (cross-country skiing, 1.5 km sprint)

Sochi 2014 

Tina Maze – gold (alpine skiing, downhill)
Tina Maze – gold (alpine skiing, giant slalom)
Peter Prevc – silver (ski jumping, normal hill)
Žan Košir – silver (snowboarding)
Peter Prevc – bronze (ski jumping, normal hill)
Žan Košir – bronze (snowboarding, parallel giant slalom)
Teja Gregorin – bronze (biathlon, 10 km pursuit)
Vesna Fabjan – bronze (cross-country skiing, sprint)

PyeongChang 2018 

Jakov Fak – silver (biathlon, 20 km)
Žan Košir – bronze (snowboarding, parallel giant slalom)

Beijing 2022 

Urša Bogataj – gold (ski jumping, normal hill)
Urša Bogataj, Nika Križnar, Peter Prevc, Timi Zajc – gold (ski jumping, normal hill, mixed team)
Peter Prevc, Timi Zajc, Cene Prevc, Lovro Kos – silver (ski jumping, large hill, team)
Žan Kranjec – silver (alpine skiing, giant slalom)
Tim Mastnak – silver (snowboarding, parallel giant slalom)
Gloria Kotnik – bronze (snowboarding, parallel giant slalom)
Nika Križnar – bronze (ski jumping, normal hill)

Medals at the Winter Olympic Games by sports

Alpine skiing	10	2	5	3
Ski jumping	9	2	3	4
Snowboarding	5	0	2	3
Biathlon	2	0	1	1
Cross-country skiing	2	0	0	2

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From *Olympic icon* to a successful business career

- What is Tina Maze doing on social media?
- How has she collaborated with another Slovenian Olympic icon, Miro Cerar?
- What is she doing in Italy?

MAJA VIRANT



Photo: Alamy.com

Tina Maze is a Slovenian sporting legend and Olympic icon. At the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi she won two gold medals – in the downhill and giant slalom – having already achieved silver medals in the super-G and giant slalom events at Vancouver 2010. After a glittering sporting career, Slovenia's most successful skier and most successful Winter Olympian is now living the entrepreneurial life.

It is a fact that elite athletes have a good predisposition to be successful entrepreneurs. The two groups have a number of characteristics in common. They know that it is necessary to persevere and invest all your energy into achieving success. They know that you have to pick yourself up after a fall, learn your lesson and carry on even better than before. They know that it isn't always easy, but that the effort is worth it in the end.

We took a look at who Tina Maze is competing and collaborating with these days, and how, now that she is no longer racing down the white slopes.

“I’m a sportswoman and, the way I see it, encouraging people to get involved with sport and develop sporting habits is my mission via social media.”

1. A social media brand

Tina Maze is a brand. She has capitalised brilliantly on her outstanding successes and is one of the few athletes still capable of marketing her own brand after the end of her career. This spring, during an appearance on TV show Tarča, she had the following to say about Slovenian athletes who are part of the global elite:

“These days I am trying to take advantage of my successes and my expertise. To put it bluntly, I am working on Tina Maze’s profile. Even though I believe that social media is harmful to young people, this is part of what I do. Which means that I’m in conflict with myself about why I’m actually doing it.

But it’s what the sponsors want. They want visibility and good content. I’m a sportswoman and, the way I see it, encouraging people to get involved with sport and develop sporting habits is my mission via social media. As a Eurosport commentator, I’m still part of the World Cup, where I give my opinions, but most of my time is taken up by running my Instagram and Facebook accounts.”

She is an excellent ambassador for Slovenia and also continues to collaborate with Stöckli, Adria and numerous other brands.

2. Expert commentator on Eurosport

She has collaborated actively with the media, both as a sports commentator and on various television projects. She is an expert commentator for Eurosport.

3. Cerar-Maze: an Olympic alliance for young athletes

She is committed to the education and training of young athletes. She has taken part in various projects aimed at promoting sport among young people and has offered them mentoring and support.

She has also been involved in organising sports camps and seminars. She has been principal ambassador of the Miroslav Cerar Foundation, dedicated to helping athletes from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

4. Motivational speaker

As a successful sportswoman and businesswoman, she has become an in-demand speaker at events of various kinds. Her motivational speeches are based on her experiences from her sporting career, where she emphasises work, perseverance and commitment.

We have even found her on the list of motivational speakers at the Swiss Speakers' Bureau.

5. Humanitarian

She has also participated in numerous humanitarian projects. She actively supports various charity organisations and projects dedicated to helping children and young people in situations of hardship.

6. Businesswoman


She runs a successful company in Italy focusing on sports equipment, sportswear and accessories. Her brand is called Tina Maze No. 1. >>

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