

BEST PRACTICE: LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA



Key Challenge

Insufficient use of new and advanced technologies in tourism.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Promotional campaigns; Digital solutions; Investments in infrastructure and product development; Research and innovation.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Urban

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 163.8 km²

Population | 297,575 in 2024

Type of Tourism | Cultural; City; MICE; Gastronomy.

DMO | 100% subsidiary of the City of Ljubljana.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local authorities/ government; ALL tourism service providers; Technology providers R&D organisations.

Additional Challenges Covered | Growth-oriented mindset; Accessibility and inclusivity; Maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage sites; Waste production and pollution; Sustainable and smart mobility solutions.

Context & Background

Over the last decade, Ljubljana has experienced a rapid increase in tourism, from around 740,000 overnight stays in 2010 to 2.2 million in 2023. This represents 18% of all arrivals and 14.3% of all overnight stays in Slovenia. Ljubljana's tourism industry employs 14.5% of the workforce, which corresponds to approximately 25% of all tourism employment in Slovenia.

Key Challenge

Digitalization and sustainability are considered important pillars of the city's tourism development. The city's digital transformation aims to effectively use new technologies in tourism to create personalized experiences and targeted advertising for tourists, manage crowds, and use resources in a more environmentally friendly and economical way.

Implementation of Solutions: A variety of digital tools to enhance the tourist experience and support sustainable behaviour in the city are being developed and R&D is being strongly promoted.

SOLUTIONS

- Digital services (apps) to enhance visitor experience and promote sustainable tourism, including:
 - URBANA smart card and the URBANA app are used for public transport, bike rental systems, cable car ride, Park and Ride services, parking payments around the city, and route planning. Since 2023, the Ljubljana Tourist Card has been added to the app, enabling visitors to explore Ljubljana's major sights.
 - Nexto app, an innovative intelligent audio city guide that enhances the tourist experience with AR elements (created in 2016).
 - Tap Water app helps users find water dispensers around the city (created in 2013).
 - Ljubljana by wheelchair app enables a simple search of relevant tourist information about Ljubljana for wheelchair users (created in 2018).
 - Digital Map at the Tourist Information Centre features almost 600 points of interest in the city and its surroundings and offers visitors the ability to use various filters based on their interests and even create their own itinerary (created in 2023).
- Digitisation of Plečnik's heritage is an innovative project that digitises the immovable cultural heritage of the architect Plečnik in the city and its surroundings (created in 2018-2020).
- Smart waste management for the increased, including tourism-related volume of waste with solar-powered, smart Bigbelly containers (more volume and most of the waste underground), the fill level of which is monitored by sensors and can therefore be emptied as needed. Ljubljana Regional Waste Management Centre is the biggest environmental project in Slovenia and the most modern facility for waste treatment in Europe, processing waste from more than a third of Slovenia.
- The establishment of technology labs that enable collaboration between companies and various R&D facilities to develop innovative tools, including the VR/AR lab opened in 2019 in the Ljubljana Technology Park or a laboratory testing environment in a shopping centre including an acceleration program or the possibility to pay with Bitcoin in "BTC City Lab".

Replicability potential: High (requires political will and high investments)

Cost & funding source: 12,000 euros for Nexto app; 17,000 euros for Ljubljana by Wheelchair app; 35,000 euros for Digital Map funded by Ljubljana Tourism; 167,625 euros for the digitisation of Plečnik's heritage funded by Ljubljana Tourism and co-financed by the Republic of Slovenia and the European Union from the European Fund for Regional Development; 2,578,000 euros for the Urbana app; Urbana app, Tap Water app, Smart waste management measures, and Technology Park Ljubljana with VR/AR Lab were all funded by the City of Ljubljana.

Success Factors & Barriers Regarding the Implementation

Success Factors: A clear vision for the future and courage and perseverance to pursue it; Good relationships and cooperation with tourism companies; Intensive communication with various departments of the municipality; Responding to the needs of residents (surveys are carried out regularly); Transparency in data and finances to build trust; An open-minded, innovation-friendly municipality.

Barriers: Resistance to innovations in parts of the community; Competitive mentality of the tourism industry, which made cooperation in developing innovations difficult (changed over the years to more cooperation).

Results and Impacts

- Improved quality of tourism offer, which also made it possible to enforce higher prices. The average daily expenditure of an international visitor was 174 euros in 2023 and rose to 190 euros in the first quarter of 2024.
- The improved quality of infrastructure and tourism led to greater satisfaction among residents. In 2023, 77% of residents have a positive attitude towards tourism. 81.6% appreciate Ljubljana's attractiveness as a tourist city and 79% agree that the quality of life in Ljubljana is high.
- Ljubljana enjoys a very good reputation (Ljubljana's online reputation score is 78 in 2023, well above the European city average of 42).

Takeaways

- Destinations need to define their own identity in order to define their vision and evolve.
- The DMO must always keep its vision in mind and have the courage to involve and convince all stakeholders of the destination.
- The process of developing new innovative projects requires a lot of patience.
- There must be continuous adaptation to global tourism trends.

Useful Links

- [Useful mobile apps](#) | [Sustainable tourism in Ljubljana](#) | Ljubljana Tourism

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