

In collaboration with

Forbes

Slovenia: Green, Smart & Creative

Slovenia sets the world standard for dynamic business practices & excellence in sustainable tourism.

With its workforce as one of its greatest assets. Slovenia has a savvy, well-educated labor force with high productivity that punches well above its weight compared to other countries in this part of Europe. Additionally, it is extremely export-oriented, with digitalization being key to Slovenia's competitiveness.

So, while it may be small, it remains a tiny powerhouse for good business practices.

With a booming tourism sector and an unparalleled nature offer, it is also one of the safest and greenest countries in the world. No doubt it always ranks high in the best destinations for quality of life and is open for both good business investments and quality tourism year round.





MINISTER MATJAŽ HAN

Minister of Economy, Tourism & Sport

What is the current state & the future of tourism in Slovenia?

This year, we have achieved pre-pandemic numbers from 2019. We recently revised our tourism strategy, emphasizing the duration of tourist stays to generate added value. We allocated over 160 million euros across various incentive programs for companies in the tourism sector, and more than 380 million euros will be dedicated to investments in tourism. This investment cycle encompasses both winter and summer tourism. Our objective is to elevate the quality to a higher standard, thereby creating added value. This approach will also result in better compensation for individuals working in the tourism industry.

How do you see the evolution of the biggest sectors? How important is the German and Austrian market in terms of investment for Slovenia?

There is notable investor interest in pharmaceuticals, which includes a recent 500 million euro investment from the USA in Lendava. This investment will create over 300 jobs with competitive salaries and will also benefit Hungary by providing employment and offering opportunities for growth in logistics.

Logistics plays a pivotal role in Slovenia, representing a sector with immense growth and potential. Our competitive edge is defined by the strategic advantage of Port of Koper. The completion of the second phase of road development to the port is expected by the end of this year.

As a result of our recent conversation with the German Minister of Infrastructure, we anticipate a growth in logistical centers over the next decade. We want to capitalize on this growth, leveraging the position of the Port of Koper. We see opportunities in attracting logistical bases from China and other countries with industrial production due to our advantageous geostrategic position.

Additionally, we are finalizing a significant investment in the automotive sector. While recent performance has been affected by reduced orders from Germany and decreased sales of electric cars, we anticipate a rebound by the end of the year. Germany remains our largest economic partner, while Austria is our largest investor.

Across various sectors, including both the automotive and logistics industries, Slovenia sees substantial potential. To support these endeavors, the state pledges 200 million euros in financial aid over the next five years.

SLOVENIA'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Competitiveness in a Dynamic Economy

What are the main sectors driving the development of the Slovenian economy?

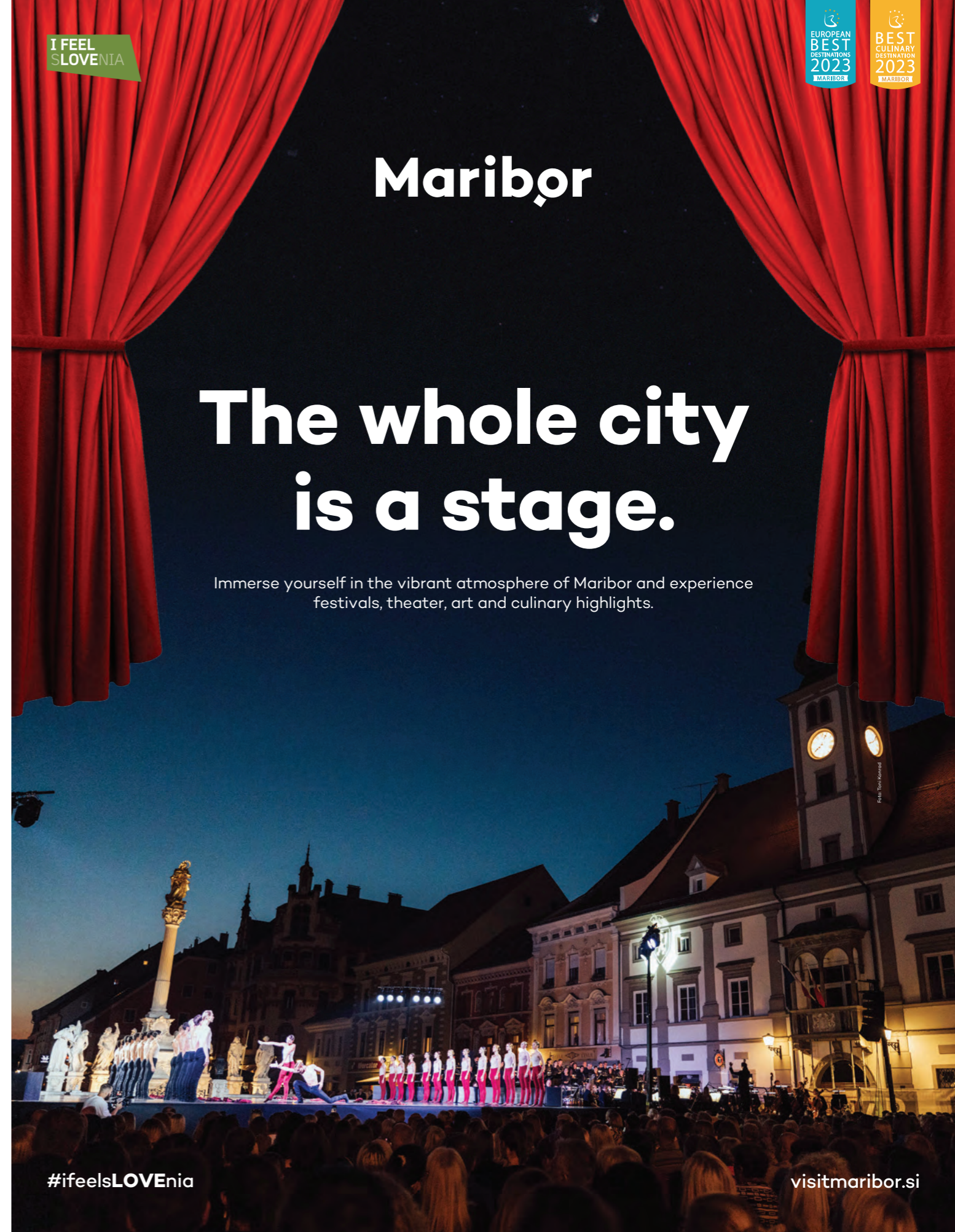
Our ministry worked for the past four years under intervention laws. Right after the crisis of the war in Ukraine, we encountered an energy crisis, which was followed by severe floods across the country. Our focus has been on assisting businesses through intervention legislation. This approach is how we managed to maintain our competitive edge in European markets. Currently, we are focused on sustaining this competitiveness. What we now need is a long-term tax reform. While we are aware of our advantages and disadvantages, and our corporate tax situation is relatively favorable, the income tax needs to be adjusted to enhance opportunities and stabilize the economy for at least the next 15 years.

Slovenia is one of the most industrialised countries in the world when compared to its population. Around 70% of our industry is exported, which is a huge advantage. We also benefit when it comes to our workforce, having an educated, hard working and skilled labor pool. We have a geostrategic position and are connected through the Port of Koper with Europe. Our next step is the green energy transformation, with our aim being to keep the cost and use of energy low, and many companies are already taking steps towards energy efficiency.

Maribor

The whole city is a stage.

Immerse yourself in the vibrant atmosphere of Maribor and experience festivals, theater, art and culinary highlights.





DR. PETER VENTURINI
Director, Helios Resins & Atcoat

RESHAPING THE RESIN INDUSTRY

Sustainable Strategies for Success

Can you give us an overview of Helios Resins & walk us through the company's evolution?

Helios Resins is part of KANSAI PAINT, one of the world's leading paint and coatings producers. Helios Resins' long-standing tradition is rooted in the establishment of the company's resin division in 1908. It all began with the processing of seed oil, evolving into the production of alkyd resin and we are proud to have survived various industry developments over the years. Our predecessors at Helios, particularly those in the resin and coating sector, laid a solid foundation for what we can offer today. Our commitment to conducting business reflects our appreciation for tradition. We aim for a long-term perspective, avoiding shortcuts and emphasizing reliability, as well as being steadfast partners for our customers, and consistently delivering value. In 2023, the German company Atcoat, which has a long tradition in synthetic resin production, became part of KANSAI PAINT. We joined forces and together we extended our competencies. Therefore, we bring many benefits to our customers: a broader product portfolio, increased R&D and innovation capabilities, higher production flexibility, and superior customer service. Currently, Germany, Italy, and France contribute to 70% of our production, highlighting our strategic market positioning.

How important is technological innovation for Helios Resins & how does it help to give the company a competitive edge?

We position ourselves as one of the leading European suppliers specializing in advanced acrylic and polyester resins. Our journey and recent developments have seen us prioritize technological advancements over sheer volume growth in the last 15-20 years. While our production volume has remained relatively stable, we have made significant strides in technology, focusing on materials that offer substantial added value to our customers, moving away from more generic commodities. Our equipment is consistently modernized and optimized which allows us to leverage cutting-edge technologies, resulting in not only the production of advanced materials but also better control over our processes, leading to higher product quality. We are committed to being a reliable partner for our customers in terms of both quality and timely delivery. This is possible also due to our 4 production sites, two in Slovenia and two in Germany, where Atcoat is located.

The ongoing transformation is not only driven by advancements in science but also by our commitment to sustainability. Legislation and public opinion, particularly regarding climate change, play pivotal roles in shaping our product offerings. Adherence to EU regulations is a priority, and we have in-house departments dedicated to staying ahead of regulatory changes.

Our proactive stance involves collaboration with universities, research institutes, and initiatives promoting sustainability. We participate in European projects and networks, such as the circular economy network, focusing on the responsible use of recycled materials.



What initiatives does the company implement to enhance employee retention within Slovenia?

We maintain strong connections with educational institutions, offering students opportunities to engage with us during their studies through initiatives like summer work. Many students also undertake their diploma, master's, and PhDs within our company. Some are even sent abroad for international exposure, to countries including the United States, Canada, and Japan. We encourage our employees to explore the world, fostering personal and professional growth.

To attract top talent, we prioritize providing excellent equipment and have a modern and well-equipped (R&D) infrastructure. In this regard, we are on par with large multinationals. While having skilled professionals is important, we recognize the importance of providing them with the right tools for optimal performance.

We take pride in creating a supportive environment. Despite the lure of international experiences, many individuals choose to return and continue working with us. This is a testament to our commitment to offering excellent working conditions.

What are the medium- & long-term plans for Helios Resins?

We want to be pioneers in advanced high-performance acrylic and polyester solutions. We focus on excelling in our competence fields, with a keen emphasis on the chemistry involved in our work. We strive to provide the most innovative and sustainable solutions, which not only drive the growth of our company but also make



meaningful contributions to our customers and society at large.

The younger generation joining our team appreciates our commitment to sustainable solutions and is motivated by the idea that chemistry can play a vital role in addressing environmental concerns, and they take pride in contributing to a better world through their work. We are dedicated to being a reliable and trustworthy partner, continuing to provide top-notch solutions that align with the values of the current world.

An integral aspect of our success in the market is our commitment to providing direct technical support to our customers. Unlike many companies that rely on distributors, we prefer to offer technical expertise directly to the customer, ensuring a more personalized and responsive approach.

Our strong focus on R&D sets us apart from traditional practices in the coatings industry. Instead of relying on trial and error, we invest in understanding the intricacies of our products, allowing us to be more flexible and responsive to customer needs. This strength becomes particularly evident in the formulation of complex sustainable solutions, where our ability to comprehend the chemistry involved and leverage modern tools, including AI, plays a crucial role.

What values would you like to extend to readers of FORBES? What do you as a manager bring to Helios Resins & what can you offer our readers?

Adaptation is crucial in delivering effective solutions, especially considering the ever-changing landscape of raw materials availability. Collaboration is another cornerstone of our approach, emphasizing close interaction with customers and suppliers, fostering reliability, and nurturing long-term relationships. We aim to create lasting connections with customers who appreciate our commitment.

Social responsibility is fundamental to our values, extending to our employees, partners, customers, the environment, and the community. We strive to be a company that neighbors are proud to have, employees are proud to work for, and customers are pleased to have as a supplier.

To further strengthen our shared vision, I believe in engaging with employees to collectively shape our future is important. The vision of Helios Resins is not mine alone; it is a collective endeavor, and I encourage individuals to contribute their perspectives. I believe that an informed and involved team is motivated to make a meaningful impact. We keep our team informed about ongoing projects, the significance of their contributions, and the business perspective behind it. Empowering our employees by providing information not only fosters a sense of responsibility but also enhances motivation and engagement.

Ultimately, I see our engaged and informed team as a driving force for innovation and success. By offering opportunities for growth and development, we not only empower individuals but also contribute to the overall advancement of our company. ●



HELIOS RESINS

Sustainable Solutions for Coatings

Helios Resins, founded in 1908, exemplifies tradition and constant evolution. Part of KANSAI PAINT, a global leader in paints and coatings, Helios Resins has carved a niche for itself in advanced acrylic and polyester resins. Their remarkable journey is a testament to continuous adaptation, a deep commitment to sustainability, and a clear vision for the future. Over time, as market needs evolved, Helios Resins introduced new technologies and new types of resin. This adaptability has served them well and laid a solid foundation for their current success in the ever-changing coatings industry. More recently, Helios Resins merged with the German company Atcoat, further strengthening its position globally. This strategic union expanded their product portfolio beyond acrylic and polyester resins, encompassing a wider range of advanced solutions. Additionally, it bolstered their research and development capabilities, allowing them to accelerate innovation and explore new frontiers in materials science. Today, with a strong presence across key European markets like Germany, Italy, and France, Helios Resins is a dominant player in the industry, leveraging its expertise and production capacity to meet the diverse needs of its customers. Technological innovation lies at the heart of Helios Resins' competitive advantage. Rather than focusing solely on mass producing generic commodity products, the company prioritizes developing high-value materials tailored to meet specific customer demands. This approach requires a deep understanding

of customer needs across various industries, from automotive and transportation to construction and industrial applications. Helios Resins achieves this through close collaboration with its customers, ensuring their products are not only innovative but also address real-world challenges. Their commitment to cutting-edge technology translates into superior product quality. Helios Resins' state-of-the-art production equipment allows them



DR. PETER VENTURINI

Director, Helios Resins & Atcoat

“ We strive to provide the most innovative & sustainable solutions, making meaningful contributions to our customers & society at large. ”

to not only manufacture advanced materials but also ensures better process control leading to consistent quality and timely deliveries. Unlike many competitors who rely solely on distributors, Helios Resins prioritizes providing direct technical support to its customers. This personalized approach ensures a more responsive and efficient service experience. Customers can expect in-depth consultations and troubleshooting directly from Helios Resins' technical experts. This fosters a strong sense of partnership and trust, allowing for collaborative problem-solving and the development of customized solutions. Combined with its robust R&D efforts, this differentiates Helios Resins in the industry. Its in-depth understanding of products allows flexibility to meet evolving customer needs, particularly when formulating complex sustainable solutions. Sustainability is a core principle that guides product development and research efforts. Recognizing that legislation and public opinion significantly influence the coatings industry, Helios Resins makes adherence to EU regulations a priority. They actively collaborate with research institutions and initiatives promoting the circular economy model, a system that emphasizes responsible resource use, minimizing waste, and maximizing the lifespan of materials. Helios Resins takes a proactive stance through participating in European projects focusing on using recycled materials in resin production. This not only reduces their environmental footprint but also opens doors to new, sustainable product lines. ●

HELIOS RESINS SUSTAINABLE APPROACH



THE SECRET INSIDE EXCELLENT PRODUCTS

Helios Resins – specialists for reliable coating and composite solutions since 1908.



www.resinshelios.com
www.atcoat.com

HELIOS RESINS | **ATCOAT**



MSC. MAJA PAK OLAJ
Director, Slovenia Tourist Board

What are Slovenia's key tourism markets and demographics?

The story of Slovenia is a story of love for nature, which is reflected in the 'I feel Slovenia' national brand. Our brand, characterized by 'Slovenian green' color, reflects our love for nature and our determination to preserve it. This is our story, and our vision for Slovenian tourism is green and boutique, with a smaller footprint and greater value for all. Our strategy invites a diverse demography, including nature lovers, outdoor travelers, cultural heritage seekers, foodies, MICE travelers, and wellness enthusiasts. We have developed a top gastronomy destination with Michelin-starred chefs and restaurants. We also have a diverse array of natural resorts for medical and wellness services. Our key markets are nearby European countries, with Germany as our number one market, followed by Italy, Austria, Czechia, and the Netherlands. We invest the majority of our promotional resources in European markets, which can be easily reached by car or train. Last year, we experienced a 24% increase in overnight stays of tourists from Germany, making us one of the countries that have already fully successfully recovered from the pandemic.

What expectations do you have for tourism countrywide in 2024? Are there new developments in your tourism offerings?

We face many challenges in tourism, such as geopolitical issues which can be quite unpredictable. However, we have made significant investments in the tourism industry over the years, working together with stakeholders to strengthen our position in the market. Through our commitment to sustainability and our green story, we have gained the trust of tourists. We anticipate positive economic outcomes, as the length of stay of our visitors is slowly increasing and spending is growing. As for our upcoming activities, we will be focusing on promoting art and culture as the main theme for the next two years. We are a part of many key tourism fairs and exhibitions this year, including ITB Berlin



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SLOVENIA: A PATHWAY FOR GROWTH

Embracing Eco-Friendly Practices in Tourism

How important is tourism to Slovenian economy & what role does it play in the socio-economic development of the country?

Tourism plays a significant role to the Slovenian economy, with its contribution continuously expanding. In 2022, tourism was 9% of the GDP of Slovenia and was responsible for 10% of total employment. Tourism alone generated 2.8 million euros in travel exports. However, Slovenia's sustainable model offers benefits that extend far beyond these immediate economic gains. It ensures that the industry also contributes in terms of environmental preservation, social responsibility, and long-term sustainable growth. We have established a comprehensive model of sustainability indicators, the Green Scheme of Slovenian tourism. This unique national tool is used to develop sustainable tourism based on international comparative standards. It includes a certification process that awards a 'Slovenian Green' label to destinations and service providers who demonstrate a commitment to environmental stewardship, while also ensuring that they contribute positively to the local community and economy. The Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism has garnered numerous prestigious international awards, but more importantly it provides Slovenia with a significant competitive edge in the global tourism market.



in March, to promote our tourism offering. We will also continue our promotional endeavors, such as our global 'I Feel Slovenia. My Way.' digital campaign. Additionally, we will hold workshops for travel industry professionals in our key markets and organize Slovenian Incoming Workshop, in which around 200 agents from around the world hold one-on-one meetings with our tourism industry. As part of our innovative approach, we are exploring the integration of artificial intelligence into our system to enhance our marketing and development efforts. Our mission is primarily focused on promotion, but we also prioritize the development of sustainable tourism. One of our current major projects is the development of a national information system which will allow us to measure tourism flows, impacts, and sustainability, providing better data for informed decision-making. It is a significant undertaking that embraces new technology.

How does the Slovenia Green label help to promote Slovenia as a sustainable tourism destination?

The Green Scheme of Slovenian tourism is a certification tool and a national program that serves as an umbrella to encourage

the development of sustainable tourism. We have 'Slovenian Green' labels for destinations and tourism providers, such as accommodation providers, parks, restaurants, travel agencies and others. The indicators cover various aspects, including local transport, waste management, and accessibility. While providers with the 'Slovenian Green' label receive it based on certain internationally recognized certificates, the process for destinations involves entering the scheme and then evaluating sustainability within three months using over 100 internationally comparable indicators. Based on the evaluation, we award labels ranging from platinum, gold, silver, to bronze. It is worth noting that the system allows for progression, where a destination can move from silver to gold or platinum in the following year. It is truly exciting to see destinations competing in the scheme, as the competitive factor promotes continuous learning in managing destination sustainability and adopting new practices. This benefits not only tourism but also improves the overall quality of life for local communities. The Green Scheme is an excellent and effective tool for achieving these goals.

Do you have a final message for the readers of FORBES?

Slovenia is one of the most diverse countries in the world. It is the only country in the EU where four geographical worlds intersect: the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Karst region with over 11,000 karst caves, and the Pannonian Plain with its mineral thermal waters. These features contribute to Slovenia's extraordinary diversity. The landscape allows for a wide range of experiences. In a short span of time, one can go skiing, attend festivals in towns or cities, visit the seaside, and go hiking. There are many opportunities for outdoor sports throughout the year. Slovenia is also recognized as one of the safest countries globally, as indicated by the World Peace Index. The passion, dedication to sustainability, and our values are reflected in our way of life. ●



SAŠA ARSENOVIČ
Mayor, Maribor

MARIBOR ON THE RISE

Fostering Innovation, Sustainability & Growth

Could you provide a brief summary of Maribor's recent economic and socio-economic history & its significance for the economy of Slovenia?

Maribor is actively revitalizing our economy by fostering innovation, tourism, and new industries to create a thriving future for our city. Our commitment goes beyond just economic growth; we aim for population increase, a rise in added value, and a shift from brain drain to brain circulation. We want Maribor to be a place where talented individuals not only flourish but also choose to stay and contribute.

The transformation we are currently seeing is particularly impressive considering our past dependence on heavy industry. In its place, a new economic landscape has emerged, with over 250 successful small businesses. While we may not boast large-scale employment hubs, our strength lies in the adaptability and diversity of this dynamic network. This helps to create a unique environment where businesses can thrive and collaborate, propelling Maribor forward as a center of innovation and opportunity. With its scenic beauty and logistical advantages, Maribor attracts international attention, as demonstrated by the successful organization of events like the IAAF European Lifting Festival, benefiting both the city's reputation and daily life.

How would you describe the workforce in Maribor?

Maribor has a population of 15 to 20 thousand temporary and permanent residents, with an additional 15 thousand students contributing to its vibrant atmosphere. Enrollment in the public university is on the rise, with 1,000 more students this year than the year before. The city has an excellent medical faculty, and plans to expand with dentistry and pharmacy programs. Investors will find a motivated workforce eager to learn and adapt. Our strategic location and recent infrastructure developments promise growth and opportunities.

What current infrastructure projects are underway in the city? How are these projects helping the city to become more sustainable?

We prioritize innovation through partnerships and pilot projects, striving to lead in technology and sustainability. Our aim is to cultivate vibrant, car-free neighborhoods, setting a new standard for urban living. A city without cars will eliminate the need for parking lots and will reshape transportation habits towards public transit, cycling, and walking.

We are exploring innovative housing solutions, including cooperative ownership models, to meet evolving demographic needs. With significant land acquisitions, we are shaping housing policies to ensure a balanced mix of affordable and high-quality residences.

Despite challenges with the railway's progress, efforts are underway to enhance connectivity, advocating for prioritizing railway infrastructure over highway construction. We have forward-thinking solutions to tackle CO2 emissions, leveraging EU funds for various projects, including urban renewal and promoting circular economy practices.

Projects like revitalizing Pekarski Creek and creating green spaces show our commitment to sustainability and community well-being. These initiatives not only enhance recreational opportunities but also contribute to environmental preservation and urban rejuvenation.

How is tourism evolving in the city & how do you balance tourism growth with sustainability?

Our city's tourism sector is experiencing a dynamic transformation. We have witnessed record-breaking figures, exceeding half a million overnight stays in 2023, a remarkable 24% increase compared to the prior year. This growth is attributed to a strategic focus on four key pillars: Maribor's renowned gastronomy, diverse sports and outdoor offerings, rich cultural heritage, and family-friendly experiences. Additionally, we maintain strong partnerships with the Štajerska and Pohorje tourism regions.



The city's event calendar is packed year-round. The Lent Festival, a three-week extravaganza before Easter, features street performers, music, and a dragon parade. Literature lovers flock to the International Poetic Marathon for a week of readings, workshops, and performances by international poets. While Maribor does not host its own carnival, the nearby town of Ptuj stages the Kurentovanje celebration, featuring elaborately costumed figures called Kurents who chase away winter.

Maribor's international recognition soared in 2023 with the prestigious titles of 3rd Best European Destination and 1st European Culinary Destination, surpassing established tourist destinations like Vienna and Rome. We are currently revitalizing the historic Lent district, the expansion of outdoor facilities in Mariborsko Pohorje, and the renovation of the House of the Oldest Vine, our most visited attraction.

Cultural development is another cornerstone of our strategy. As the former European Capital of Culture in 2012, we want to capitalize on this legacy to further enrich the visitor experience. By collaborating with national tourism efforts, we can ensure Maribor's exceptional cultural offerings become a magnet for



tourists, complementing our already celebrated culinary scene. Maribor is a city on the rise. We are achieving a balanced approach to tourism growth, prioritizing unique experiences, cultural immersion, and responsible development.

What would your final message be to readers of FORBES?

Maribor is an up-and-coming, dynamic city, attracting visitors and investors alike. People can experience award-winning cuisine, explore a vibrant atmosphere with a young population, and enjoy a city committed to sustainability with green spaces and car-free initiatives. Visitors can immerse themselves in rich culture and beautiful surroundings. Beyond the city limits, the Pohorje mountain range is a popular destination for hiking, biking, and skiing in the winter. Pohorje National Park is home to the largest forest reserve in Slovenia, making it a haven for nature lovers. The strategic location of Maribor offers access to Austria and is connected by rail to other cities in Slovenia as well as Central and Eastern Europe.

Outside of tourism, investors and businesses will find a talented and motivated workforce, eager to learn and adapt. The city fosters a culture of innovation, providing partnerships and pilot projects to help businesses to grow and expand. With a thriving economy transitioning from heavy industry to a dynamic mix of successful small businesses, Maribor offers a stable and supportive environment for growth. ●





MR. JURE STRUC
Director, Maribor Tourist Board

MARIBOR'S TOURISM EVOLUTION

Promoting Vibrant Cultural Heritage

What is the role of Maribor Tourism in the development of the city's tourist landscape?

Maribor is a new star on Slovenia's tourist map with Maribor Tourist Board playing a crucial role in shaping and enhancing its tourist landscape. Our primary objective is to promote Maribor as a vibrant and attractive destination, showcasing its unique cultural heritage, natural beauty, and diverse experiences to domestic and international visitors. We work closely with local tourism businesses, cultural institutions, and community stakeholders to upgrade our offer and train our local tourism providers. Our ambitious strategy does not only aim to boost the city's economic growth, but also to preserve its identity and enhance the overall experience. This year, Slovenian tourism has entered a two-year cycle where art and culture serve as the main themes for tourist promotion and product development. This means that after achieving the titles of No. 3 European Tourist Destination and No. 1 European Culinary Destination in 2023, Maribor, designated as the European Capital of Culture in 2012, is now ready for a new challenge: transforming its cultural capital into tangible tourist prospects.

What are some of the greatest goals in the development of tourism in & around Maribor and how are you tackling them?

Maribor recorded record growth in tourist arrivals and overnight

stays in 2023. This, together with the maximum increase in the tourist tax, resulted in a growth of around 60% in the tourist tax collected compared to the previous year. Quality over quantity has been an imperative in global tourism for some time now, and it is of strategic importance for Maribor. Additional hotel capacity for business guests, upgrading existing and developing new conference centers, and revitalizing Maribor Airport are just a few of the areas that can provide a further boost to MICE activity in our wider region, and are also concrete objectives of the Maribor Tourism Strategy 2027. With last year's summer edition of European Youth Olympic Festival, Maribor proved that it is one of the best hosts of sporting events - be it the Golden Fox Trophy in Alpine skiing, the Mountain Bike World Cup, or Champions League football matches - and that the organization of sporting competitions at the highest level has great potential. In Maribor, during the 10-day sports festival, we experienced a tourist vibe comparable to that of much more established European destinations. With unique venues over short distances, a renewed sports infrastructure, the excellent organization of competitions in 11 sports and the hospitality shown, the city has undoubtedly strengthened its competitiveness in the field of organizing sporting events at the highest level.

What does Maribor offer to tourists & what are its strengths compared to neighboring destinations?

Maribor offers a unique blend of cultural, historical, and natural

Dejan Bulut



Igor Unuk

attractions. Our city boasts a rich heritage dating back centuries, with charming medieval architecture, vibrant festivals, and a thriving arts scene. Additionally, Maribor is a gateway to the picturesque Pohorje Mountains, offering outdoor enthusiasts opportunities for hiking, skiing, and adventure activities. Moreover, our city prides itself on its warm hospitality, authentic cuisine, and affordability compared to some of the more touristy neighboring destinations. In Maribor, everything is "at your doorstep", with top-quality gastronomic and cultural experiences at the forefront. The green forests of Pohorje and the sunny wine hills are so close to the city centre that being in contact with nature is virtually unavoidable even for city break tourists or business guests - and stimulating for well-being and productivity. As the second largest city in the country, Maribor is just an hour's drive from Ljubljana, and just 45 minutes from Graz in Austria. Not only is it easily accessible and competitively priced; it is also just the right size and has not yet encountered mass tourism. Our biggest tourist attraction is the World's Oldest Grapevine. It grows in the oldest - and just recently renewed - part of the town called Lent and is our most visited tourist attraction. Its wine bar is a meeting point and a temple of more than 50 local - and internationally renowned - Styrian winemakers. Moreover, every year, the City of Maribor donates the vine's grafts to partner cities and organizations from around the world - currently, 102 such grafts are planted in foreign countries on four different continents. Our ambition is to make the 450-year-old grapevine a mecca for winegrowers and wine lovers from all over the world.

How important is sustainable development of tourism in Maribor?

The Sustainable Development and Marketing Strategy of the Tourist Destination Maribor for the period 2022-2027 defines in detail the sustainable components that are key to any vision of tourism development. This goal requires us to intensify the focus of our tourism offer on green, boutique and local components. Destination Maribor is also actively involved and encourages local providers to participate in the national-level certification Green Scheme for Slovenian Tourism, which brings together all efforts for sustainable tourism development in Slovenia under the brand Slovenia Green.

Klemen Golob



It provides destinations and tourist providers with concrete tools to assess and improve their sustainability performance and promotes green performance. Maribor is working towards a comprehensive system of sustainable mobility in the city, including closing the city centre to traffic and the highly successful introduction of the Mbajk bike rental system. The intensive infrastructural renovation of the city centre is making Maribor more friendly to both locals and tourists. What is best for us and our guests is the idea behind a destination collective brand called Our Finest, which currently brings together 75 of the best local providers of 230 services, products, accommodation and experiences for even greater local integration, sustainable tourism and eco-friendly experiences.

How would you spend a weekend in Maribor if you were a tourist?

As a tourist in Maribor, I would begin by exploring the historic Old Town, wandering through its cultural quarters and streets, admiring iconic landmarks such as Maribor Castle and the Art Gallery's notorious exhibition, *Specter*. I would continue my stroll through the cultural quarter Minoriti to the vibrant Lent district along the Drava river. As the sun sets, I would immerse myself in Maribor's cultural scene, attending a live performance or music festival, such as Lent Festival in June, the biggest and most popular outdoor festival in Slovenia and the wider region. The next day would be dedicated to the abundance of the green scenery in or near the city centre- a stroll in the city park and a short hike to the Pyramid Hill for the best view of the city, or to a 10-minute drive by the city bus to the lower station of the Pohorje cable car. There is even a possibility to visit the Slovenia's oldest town Ptuj by taking a leisurely bike ride along the Drava Cycling Route. ●



SLOVENIA: WHERE EXCITING, & SUSTAINABLE ADVENTURES AWAIT

Slovenia is rapidly emerging as a must-visit destination. Its tourism strategy, captured by the slogan “I feel Slovenia,” reflects the country’s love for nature and commitment to sustainable practices. “The Green Scheme of Slovenian tourism is a certification tool and a national program that serves as an umbrella to encourage the development of sustainable tourism.” states Maja Pak Olaj, director of the Slovenian Tourist Board. “This benefits not only tourism but also improves the overall quality of life for local communities.”

Slovenia lies at the intersection of four geographical worlds. It is the only EU country where the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Pannonian Basin, and the Karst region converge, offering a remarkable range of experiences. Nature lovers can choose from mountain adventures in the Julian Alps, a playground for hikers, cyclists, and rock climbers. The majestic Triglav National Park, Slovenia’s only national park, boasts the country’s highest peak, Mount Triglav, and offers breathtaking trails through valleys, glacial lakes, and beneath towering peaks. For those seeking a gentler pace, charming mountain villages like Bled, with its iconic church perched on an island in the middle of a glacial lake, and Bohinj, a haven for water sports enthusiasts like kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding, provide a tranquil escape amidst breathtaking scenery. Slovenia’s subterranean world is equally captivating. The Postojna Cave, a labyrinthine network of caverns adorned with stalactites and stalagmites, offers guided tours that reveal a wonderland sculpted by nature

over millions of years. A highlight is a ride on the world’s only subterranean railway, taking visitors deep into the heart of the cave system. The Škocjan Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, boast the largest underground canyon in Europe, where visitors can see the natural formations, including a breathtaking natural bridge towering over the Reka River. Although Slovenia’s coastline may be short, it has a lot to offer residents and visitors alike. The picturesque town of Piran, with its Venetian-inspired architecture and vibrant harbor, offers a taste of the Mediterranean. While charming coastal villages like Strunjan provide a peaceful retreat for those seeking relaxation on secluded beaches or exploring the stunning Strunjan Nature Park, a protected area known for its salt pans and diverse birdlife. The strategic location at the crossroads of Central and Southeast Europe has resulted in a rich cultural tapestry. The capital city, Ljubljana, with its Baroque architecture, lively cafes lining the Ljubljanica River, and a vibrant cultural scene, offers a real introduction to Slovenian culture. Visitors can

MSC MAJA PAK OLAJ
Director, Slovenian Tourist Board

“Through our commitment to sustainability & our commitment to being “green”, we have gained the trust of many tourists both at home & abroad.”

explore the Triple Bridge, a major landmark that embodies Ljubljana’s past and present, or explore the Central Market, a bustling hub showcasing fresh local produce and traditional crafts. History buffs can look into the country’s past at sites like Otoecec Castle, a picture-perfect castle set on an island amidst Krka River, or explore the Roman ruins in the town of Ptuj, Slovenia’s oldest town. For a unique cultural experience, visitors can experience the Slovenia’s vibrant folklore traditions, which are often celebrated through festivals and events throughout the year, like Kurentovanje, a carnival held in Ptuj featuring elaborately costumed characters. Slovenia is also home to Nova Gorica, the European Capital of Borderless Culture 2025. Beyond its natural beauty, Slovenia boasts a rich culinary scene. Fresh, seasonal ingredients take center stage, with dishes like “jota,” a stew made with sauerkraut and sausage, and “štruklji,” a savory or sweet rolled dough dish, being local favorites. The country is divided into distinct gastronomic regions, each with its own specialties. Slovenia is also becoming a haven for wine lovers, with its distinct wine regions producing world-class varietals. From the crisp whites of the Vipava Valley to the some of the best sweet wines in the world of the Podravje region. Slovenian wines offer a complement to the country’s culinary scene. Slovenia truly stands out as a leader in sustainable tourism. Eco-friendly accommodations, locally-sourced ingredients in restaurants, and a well-developed network of public transportation options that allow visitors to explore the country without relying on cars are just some examples of Slovenia’s dedication to sustainability. Its commitment to responsible travel practices ensures the long-term preservation of its natural beauty and cultural heritage for future generations. ●

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MARIBOR CITY: WHERE CULTURE & EVENTS ABOUND

Maribor, the charming Slovenian city known for its rich cultural heritage and scenic beauty, is gearing up for an exciting season of festivals and cultural events. As the summer approaches, locals and tourists can look forward to a calendar full of experiences that showcase the spirit of Maribor.

One of the standout events is the Opera Night in the City Park, taking place on the 31st of May. This open-air extravaganza invites both locals and tourists to enjoy a mesmerizing performance under the stars, with no entry fee required. It is a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the beauty of opera while surrounded by the ambiance of Maribor's City Park. Gastronomy enthusiasts are in for a treat with the Velvet Dinner Among the Vineyards, happening on the 4th of June. This gastronomic highlight celebrates Maribor's recent recognition as Europe's top culinary destination in 2023.

For those seeking a celebration of music, art, and culture, the Lent Festival is not to

be missed. Taking place from the 21st to the 29th of June, this vibrant and dynamic festival brings the city to life with a diverse

program of performances, workshops, exhibitions, and street events. From live music concerts to art installations, the Lent Festival offers a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the energy of Maribor. As Saša Arsenovič, the Mayor of Maribor, states, "Maribor is a city on the rise. We are achieving a balanced approach to tourism



growth, prioritizing unique experiences, cultural immersion, and responsible and sustainable development." The upcoming festivals and cultural events exemplify this vision by showcasing the city's cultural heritage, culinary offer, and arts scene. Not only is Maribor a popular tourist destination but also a thriving hub for invest-

ment and business. With its commitment to sustainability and responsible development, Maribor offers a unique opportunity for investors who value both economic growth and environmental stewardship. Maribor's economic transformation from heavy industry to a dynamic network of small businesses has been instrumental

in propelling the city forward as a center of innovation and opportunity. Through strategic investments and support from the local government, Maribor has successfully attracted businesses that align with its vision of sustainable development. With its scenic beauty, logistical advantages, and commitment to sustainability, Maribor continues to capture the attention of both domestic and international visitors. These festivals and cultural events further enhance the city's reputation as a must-visit destination, offering a unique blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. Jure Struc, director of the Maribor Tourist Board, says it best: "Our city prides itself on its warm hospitality, authentic cuisine, and affordability compared to some of the more touristy neighboring destinations. In Maribor, everything is 'at your doorstep', with top-quality gastronomic and cultural experiences at the forefront."

As the festival season in Maribor begins, locals and tourists alike can look forward to a summer filled with culture under the stars, theatrical performances, gastronomy, and an explosion of art and music. It is a testament to Maribor's spirit and its dedication to creating memorable experiences for all who visit. ●





BOJAN GANTAR
CEO, Hidria

What makes Hidria stand out amongst competitors in the world of automotive & industrial technologies?

We can distill our endeavors into three core principles. Firstly, our focus revolves around developing cutting-edge solutions tailored for electrified vehicles, particularly emphasizing advanced stator and rotor core for traction motor and high-tech die casting techniques utilizing lightweight aluminum alloys. This segment embodies our commitment to innovation and sustainability. Secondly, our foray into the market with our large axial fan signifies another crucial area of our operations. This innovation has demonstrated a remarkable 10% improvement in efficiency over competing products, with over 50% of our solutions earmarked for integration into sustainable heating systems, including highly efficient heat pumps. Lastly, our Optymus PSG glow plug, equipped with pressure sensors, represents a cornerstone in our commitment to reducing fuel consumption and harmful emissions, ensuring a cleaner and more efficient future for automotive technology.

While our product portfolio reflects our dedication to sustainability, our production processes also adhere to this ideology. We have implemented automated, robotized, and digitized processes, significantly reducing our carbon footprint, energy consumption, and waste output. Our unwavering commitment to achieving zero negative environmental impact has led us to implement a comprehensive sustainability strategy that encompasses our entire supply chain and operational spectrum.



JURE REPANŠEK
General Manager, Hotel Bohinj Alpinia Group

What is your vision for Hotel Bohinj & the other hotels in your group?

Our overarching vision revolves around more than just hotel operations; it is about crafting unforgettable experiences. Presently, we oversee three operational hotels, with plans to include Hotel Vogel, Hotel Zlatorog, and Vila Muhr in our portfolio. For us, hospitality is not merely about selling rooms; it is about curating holistic experiences. In our quest to redefine hospitality, we have adopted a farm-to-table approach. Every ingredient, from milk to meat, is sourced locally, reflecting our commitment to supporting regional farmers and suppliers. Our commitment to sustainability extends beyond environmental considerations to encompass social impact. By supporting local families and businesses, we reduce reliance on commuting to jobs outside the valley, minimizing carbon emissions and helping to build a self-sustaining community. This approach embodies our vision of genuine sustainability—one that benefits both the environment and the people within our valley.



ROSWITA GOLCER HRASTNIK
CEO, BioSistemika

What are the key factors contributing to the success & innovation of BioSistemika?

First, our expertise in software development for laboratory devices stems from our core competency, nurtured by experienced life scientists who originated from the National Institute of Biology. Our collaborations with industry giants ensure our solutions meet market demands.

Secondly, our proprietary products, like our renowned SciNote Electronic Laboratory Notebook and PlatR pipetting Aid, have gained global recognition and are widely utilized by regulatory agencies and scientists worldwide.

Thirdly, our digitalization consulting service guides labs in selecting and implementing the optimal laboratory management and automation systems that align with their needs.

Our interdisciplinary team fosters innovation through collaboration, while strategic partnerships with research institutes and SMEs drive breakthroughs. Many of our research and development efforts focus on sustainable solutions. One notable example is DATANA, a DNA data storage technology that has been supported by the European Innovation Council.

By bridging the technological and biological realms, we pioneer solutions that advance scientific discovery and diagnostics, positioning BioSistemika at the forefront of innovation.



Continued interview with
MINISTER MATJAŽ HAN
Minister of Economy, Tourism & Sport

How is Slovenia addressing the workforce crisis caused by economic emigration to western EU countries?

We recognize that the challenge of economic emigration is not unique to Slovenia, but is something shared across Europe. However, we view this challenge as an opportunity, considering the high quality of life in Slovenia. Our country boasts excellent social care services and we provide strong support for young families. Many people choose to return to Slovenia, especially when starting a family, as we offer an exceptional standard of living. We believe it is beneficial for individuals to leave, gain new knowledge and experiences, and then return to settle here.

What kind of incentives is the state giving business to help them through the green transformation?

Approximately a year ago, we initiated a tender for 50 million euros in funds dedicated to the digital transformation of the economy. Recognizing the importance of digitalization, we are also actively supporting the green transformation. For instance, businesses opting for solar panels receive state co-financing, and financial incentives are provided to those investing in new technologies. The current economic landscape is linked to digitalization and green transformation, and companies that fail to undergo transformation risk falling behind, impeding their ability to attract new clients and grow. ●



Vid Rožar

PETRA STUŠEK

Managing Director, Ljubljana Tourism

What strategies has Ljubljana implemented to boost year-round tourism?

As the capital city, Ljubljana doesn't have distinct on and off seasons, but 48.5% of overnight stays occur between the end of May and September. The shoulder season, particularly February and November, is shrinking as we focus on creating attractive offers for these periods. Different strategies are used for leisure and meetings industries, with the latter showing a 3.5% higher daily expenditure.

We emphasize events, hosting over 10,000 annually, many free and funded through tourism tax. Ljubljana boasts 14 international festivals, often free and held on the streets, reflecting our cultural DNA.

With 11% of the city budget dedicated to culture, it's clear this is a priority. Our status as a UNESCO City of Literature and our unique celebration of our greatest poet on the national holiday highlight the importance of culture in Ljubljana. ●



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