

Explore and Enjoy

Savinja Valley Region
and Krapina-Zagorje
County





Key:

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|--|-----------------------|--|---------------------|
| | International airport | | Castle ruins |
| | Sport airport | | Archaeological site |
| | Notable church | | Cave |
| | Notable monastery | | Power plant |
| | Castle, manor | | Mine |

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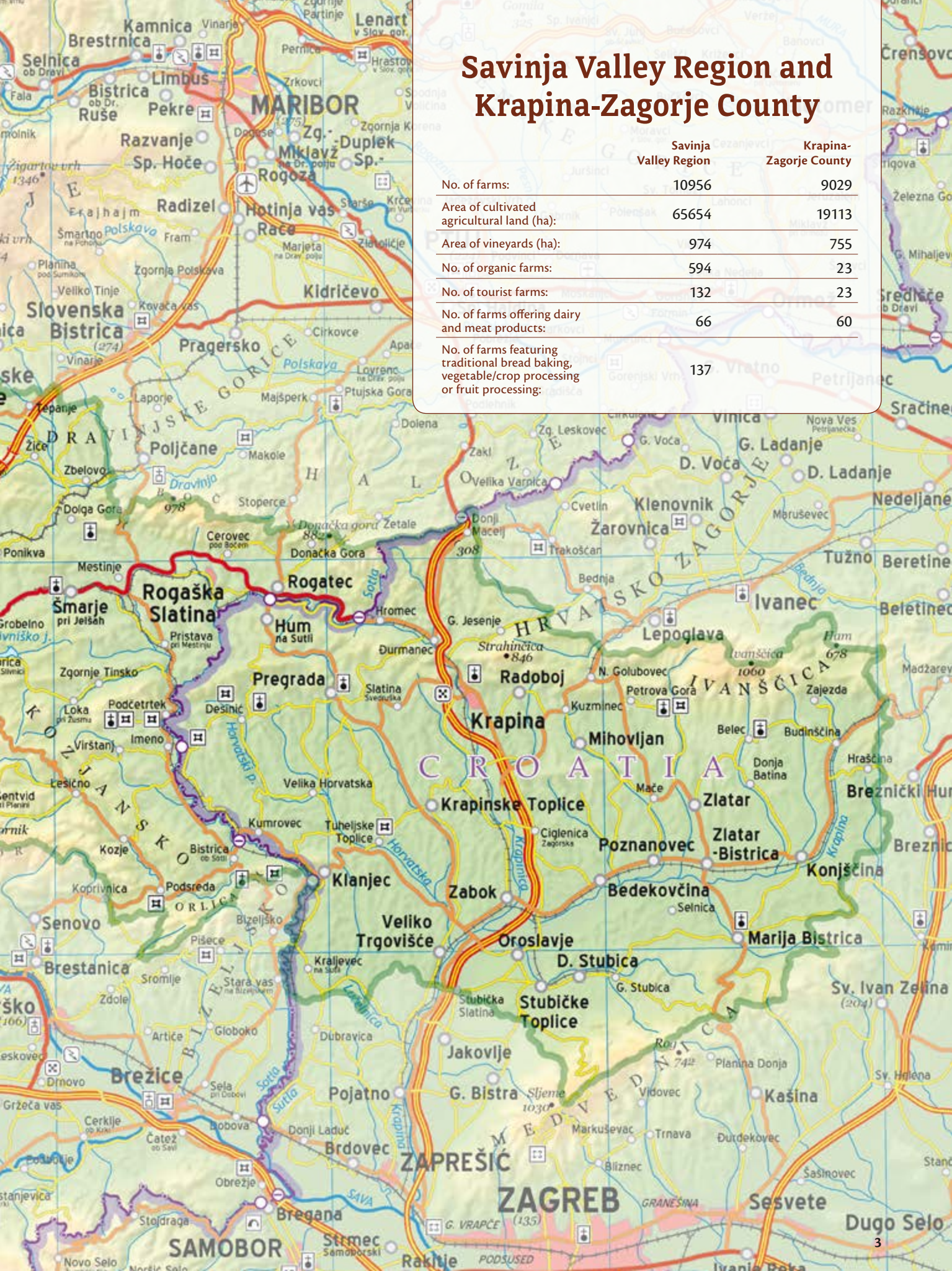
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Savinja Valley Region and Krapina-Zagorje County

	Savinja Valley Region	Krapina-Zagorje County
No. of farms:	10956	9029
Area of cultivated agricultural land (ha):	65654	19113
Area of vineyards (ha):	974	755
No. of organic farms:	594	23
No. of tourist farms:	132	23
No. of farms offering dairy and meat products:	66	60
No. of farms featuring traditional bread baking, vegetable/crop processing or fruit processing:	137	





The Klemenšek farm and Kamnik-Savinja Alps viewed from a panoramic road above the Logar Valley



The entry to the Logar Valley landscape park gives a sweeping view of this glacially formed valley, embraced by coniferous woods and the peaks of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps.



Ploughed in October, a field at Buče in Kozjanski park is ready to be sown with wheat.



The view from the Bolfan Vinski Vrh winery reaches all the way to Mt Ivanščica (1061 m alt.).

Tradition Enhanced by Modern Practices

The landscape between the Savinja Alps and Croatian Zagorje is varied and dynamic, with the scenery changing every few kilometres: from the steep north faces of the mountains to the green slopes with meadows and woods; from flatlands with fastidiously cultivated fields and small villages to gentle hills with well-tended vineyards and orchards.

Just as the landscape is varied, so are the crops of the family farms which are a common feature of both the Savinja region in Slovenia and the Krapina-Zagorje County in Croatia. Here, farming is characterised by commitment to the land, family tradition and harmony with nature, and on the other hand by openness to current know-how, innovation and a forward-looking mindset. Many farms have found their niche in producing good, healthy food and tourism. They welcome visitors, offering the best of what they produce with great respect for tradition, nature and fellow people. The treats on offer take visitors to a world of traditional values, old stories, farming skills, resourcefulness and adaptation to nature.



Zagorje – fairy tale at hand



Wine-grower Mladen Micak doing green pruning in the vineyard



Mladen Micak's vineyard gives a fine view towards Marija Bistrica.

The tourist farm of Marko Kos in Sveti Križ Začretje



The great pasque flower,
a protected plant
species on Mt Boč



A view from Tinsko across hilly land around Šmarje and Rogaška Slatina, and Mt Boč (978 m alt.)



Zagorje – fairy tale at hand: hilly land in the Krapina-Zagorje County



A tour of the Zaboky selo agritourism in Zabok

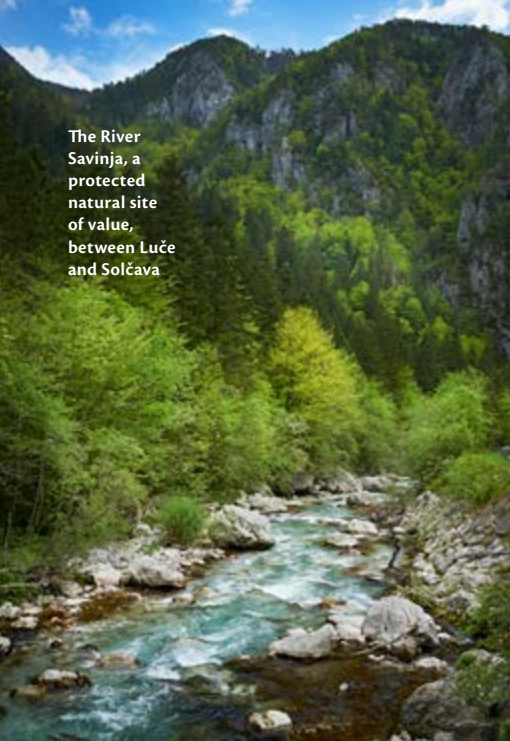
Besides the preserved cultivated landscape, the wealth of this area lies in its pristine nature with several protected areas. The landscape parks Logarska dolina, Robanov kot, Boč-Donačka gora, Golte, Ponikovski kras, Ribnik Vrbje with its surroundings and Kozjanski regijski park (the latter is also a biosphere reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme) in Slovenia side, and the Medvednica nature park in Croatia offer visitors endless possibilities to experience nature.

Though the natural world is highly diverse and varied, the Savinja region and the Krapina-Zagorje County also have much in common. They were both under the dominion of the mighty house of the Counts of Celje, one of the most influential noble families in Europe in the first half of the 15th century, and both saw a great uprising of

the serfs led by Matija Gubec in 1573, which left a strong mark on folk literature and historic memories. The local monasteries, which spread new knowledge and skills across the country, influenced the methods of producing and preparing food and drink, and also left a precious legacy of herbal and medicinal learning.

Mineral and thermal springs were instrumental in the early development and boom of spa tourism. Many farms diversified into tourism years ago to complement their production of quality food, a lot who have switched to organic farming and focused on preserving local crop varieties and livestock breeds. This is the foundation of the diverse, tasty and healthy food offered by the hospitable farms.

The Savinja region boasts two European Destinations of Excellence under the EDEN programme: in 2009, this flattering title was



The River Savinja, a protected natural site of value, between Luče and Solčava



Organic farmer Peter Koren from Loče checking the ripeness of the wheat



Autumn ploughing in Bistrica ob Sotli



A view from meadows, rich in orchids, on Vetrnik hill in Kozjanski park

received by Solčavsko for developing quality tourism in protected natural areas, and in 2013 by Laško where access to local tourist attractions and programmes was ensured to everybody including people with various disabilities. Well-preserved nature, a rich cultural heritage which spans from prehistory to our age, hospitable locals and a tourist tradition – all this warrants visitors who love coming back again and again.

Making tasty dishes from simple ingredients has always been an art mastered by farmers wives. Nowadays, kitchens are often run by cooks, female as well as male, who not only possess the traditional know-how inherited from their mothers and grandmothers but were also trained in gastronomy at hospitality and hotel management schools. They enhance old recipes with modern cuisine prepared

from organically produced, fresh ingredients which go into the pot straight from the field, a reliable guarantee for superior culinary delights.

In these hospitable country homes, you will not feel like a tourist but like a welcome guest. Proud of the results of their labour as well as their roots, the farmers and their wives are passing their ancestors' traditions to their children. They will be happy to open the doors to their homes and cellars, give you a tour of their fields, vineyards and orchards, and offer you the best products of their work and love for the land. If you are willing to listen, they will also share their stories, wisdoms about life and the mysteries of nature they live with.



A wine-grower appreciates the noble crop at harvest time.



The market at Bohač's hayrack in Nazarje is open every Saturday morning.



A rich table of traditional Zagorje specialties at the tourist farm of Marko Kos



A view of the Church of St Jacob in Okonina near Ljubno and the snowy slopes of Mt Raduha (2062 m alt.)





A tour of organic apple production at the Pšaker farm in Braslovče



Welcome drink on a farm

Unat's farm in Nazarje; some farms have set up shops selling crops and products, their own and from local farms.





In 2014, Marija Bistrica was the venue for the Štruklijada, a cross-border culinary festival where visitors could watch how Zagorje štruklji are made.

Štruklji – Wide Variety and a Heavenly Taste!

Both Zagorje and Slovenia are home to the tradition of making 'štruklji'. Štruklji from Zagorje, made from phyllo dough, filled with curd cheese, sour cream and eggs, neatly rolled, topped with cream and browned in the oven, are recognized and protected as a traditional dish and an element of Croatian intangible cultural heritage. Zagorje štruklji have a wide reputation. In order to preserve their traditional preparation, a large culinary festival called Štruklijada is held each year in a different town of the Krapina-Zagorje County. The best cooks, bakers, restaurant owners and housewives come to the festival to compete in the preparation of štruklji. Visitors can watch them being made by skilful hands and, of course, sample all the treats. This event is not just about štruklji; every year, the wealth of cultural heritage is on display, from picturesque national costumes and dancing, to traditional skills and handicrafts associated with the gastronomic heritage of Zagorje.



Every housewife has her own recipe for Zagorje štruklji, with little secrets of making the pastry and filling.



Getting Zagorje štruklji ready for baking.



Marjanca Deželak from Debro near Laško preparing štruklji with special baked cream.



Štrukljada is an opportunity to sample some original Zagorje štruklji.



Anica Levart from Loče near Slovenske Konjice makes štruklji from buckwheat flour and with curd cheese and millet porridge filling.



Demonstration of traditional customs, dances and costumes at the Štrukljada in Marija Bistrica



On tourist farms in the Savinja Valley region, *štruklji* are among the most popular dishes.



Curd cheese *štruklji* and *žlinkrofi* (similar to ravioli) make an excellent side dish with meat dishes.



Štruklji with baked cream in soup

Štruklji are one of the most typical Slovenian dishes, made all over the country but in many different ways. They come in more than hundred versions, prepared with different types of flour and fillings, sweet and savoury, boiled and baked – but always mouth-watering! In addition to the distinctive tarragon *štruklji*, a Slovene peculiarity, every region has its original method of preparing *štruklji* and their ingredients and fillings. In the past, housewives would make them when the hardest farm jobs were being done and serve them as the

main course. *Štruklji* are now obviously also a popular festive dessert, especially the sweet variety.

In the Laško area, *štruklji* are typically prepared with special baked cream and boiled in water to make a tasty soup in which they are served. In the Šalek Valley, traditional delicacies include *gluhi štruklji* from leavened dough which are in fact not proper *štruklji*; rather than rolls they are dumplings from leavened dough, boiled and sprinkled with walnuts and sugar.

However served, as a starter, side dish, main course or dessert, you will be licking your fingers!

The word '*štruklji*' comes from Austrian German – Struckel means 'dough roll'. Sliced *štruklji* with filling have a characteristic spiral through the middle. Even ancient wise men knew that this shape embodies one of the laws of nature and the universe. No wonder that *štruklji* have such a heavenly taste!



The Staro selo Kumrovec Museum is the largest open-air ethnographic museum in Croatia. It consists of around forty surviving residential houses and farming buildings.



Rogatec open-air museum

Some Popular Dishes are Very Old

Today, the dining tables still feature dishes made in the bread oven and dishes cooked since a time when farm houses had 'black kitchens' or even rooms with open fireplaces. Various types of stews, casseroles, kaša (boiled grain), močnik (floury soup) and žganci (crumbly polenta) date back to times most easily pictured if you visit a museum farm house or an open-air museum.

Two large open-air museums are located in Rogatec and Kumrovec, and many farms still have old buildings with original interiors which the owners are happy to show to visitors. Old farms, 'preužitkarske' houses (where an old farmer would move after handing over the farm to his heir), granaries, hay racks and bee houses are important items of cultural heritage which bears witness to life in the past, to old ways of making and storing foods and to the resourcefulness of farm housewives who were able to whip up delicious meals for the family and farmhands with modest means. You can also visit working museum watermills, where flour is still made the old-fashioned way, as a fresh and sweet-smelling ingredient for a number of flour-based delicacies.



While also enjoyed as an independent dish, buckwheat žganci is most often served with mushroom soup or stews on farms in the Savinja Valley region.



At the Staro selo museum, you can see permanent exhibitions of traditional crafts and customs in Zagorje from the late 19th century; a Zagorje wedding celebration.



Zagorska hiža ('Zagorje house') at the Staro selo Kumrovec Museum features the From Grain to Cake display.



The Sever Winery produces only small quantities of *sokol* wine intended for tastings and ratings.

A Treasure Trove of Wine Diversity

Traditional wine-growing countries have a special charm for visitors.

In recent years, winegrowers of the Krapina-Zagorje County, a part of the Zagorje-Medimurje wine-growing sub-region, have changed over to wines produced in smaller amounts but steadily improving in quality and often even achieving top international quality. Today, their vineyards mainly produce Rhine Riesling, Pinot Blanc and Gris, Chardonnay, Welschriesling (or 'graševina' in Croatia), Sauvignon, Silvaner, Muscat, Cabernet Sauvignon and Blaufränkisch, while some vineyards still grow indigenous varieties: *dišeča belina*, *mirkovaća*, *krpinska belina* and *sokol*. Studies have shown that *krpinska belina* is a direct parent variety to Chardonnay and that it is genetically present in at least 70 known grapevine varieties; this means it is a very old variety, probably linked to the beginnings of wine-making in this part of Europe.

The last twenty plants of the indigenous variety *sokol*, which was found in Klanjec, were saved from ruin by the wine-grower Zvonko Sever. *Sokol* has

been grown since 1629, as evident from a set of documents whereby Sigismund Erdödy gave the Franciscans the Klanjec estate along with its vineyards. This very early variety has almost vanished due to its poor fertility. Zvonko Sever propagated it to 400 plants and each year he produces only a few tens of litres of *sokol* – once the most precious wine, drank by dignitaries of the Zagreb archdiocese. "The wine is very special and tastes of antiquity," says Mr Sever. "It is slightly suggestive of Gewurztraminer, but less aromatic. *Sokol* is certainly an indigenous variety worth preserving as a part of the history of wine-growing."

A visit to the extensive vineyards and the cellar of the Bolfan Vinski Vrh in eastern Zagorje is a special experience. The cellar stands on the site of an ancient Roman military



A view of the Franciscan monastery in Klanjec and the slopes of Sokol in the background, where a plantation of the indigenous vine bearing the same name was discovered. The vineyard was first tilled in the 17th century by the Franciscans to make *sokol* wine.



Mladen Micak's vineyard



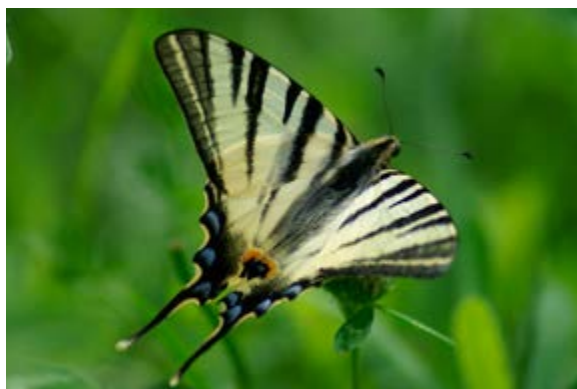
A wine tasting at Mladen Micak's cellar in Marija Bistrica

fort – quite understandably, considering the panoramic view it offers. “Legend has it that elves live here. They offered the Roman soldiers a drink and their wine cast a spell on them, making them forget all about war; instead, they sang and enjoyed each other’s company over the fine elvish wine. We are trying to recreate this fairy-tale in the present!” laughs the owner Tomislav Bolfan who introduced organic wine-making in his vineyards. A walk among the vines with butterflies fluttering about and bees humming is sure to enchant visitors and inspire them with respect for the creatures of nature – elvish and others – and for the wine and goodies that complement it.

The area of vineyards from Kozjansko to Bizeljsko fall under the wine-growing sub-region of Šmarje-Virštajn, and the vineyards in Konjiško including the well-known Škalce site to the Maribor wine-growing sub-region. “Both sub-regions are part of the Styrian Slovenia wine-growing region and they are famous for elegant, varietally typical aromatic white wines, which include the predominant Welschriesling, in the good company of Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Rhine Riesling and other varieties. The area is also suitable for the cultivation of excellent red varieties, with Blaufränkisch prevailing,” explains the oenologist Tadeja Vodovnik Plevnik.



Visitors to the Bolfan Vinski Vrh winery in Hraščina can enjoy the smells, flavours and a lovely view.



The Sail Swallowtail, a large butterfly, was captured by our lens in an organic vineyard.



Having a good time on the terrace of the Masnec tourist farm with a view of Veliki Tabor Castle.



Maturing cheese at the Pavlin goat farm in Zlatar



Enjoying roast chestnuts at Vuglec Breg in Škaričevo near Krapina



Zagorje cheeses fortify the body and soul.



A south-facing view from the Bolfan Vinski Vrh wine-growing estate

Autumn

Autumn paints the woods in colours that would shame no painter. Maize fields, squashes, autumn leaves – all are golden! Harvesting the crops is linked to festivities, jolly company and delicious autumn foods: roast chestnuts, must and treats which used to be made to restore strength after strenuous work. On St Martin's Day, when must turns into wine, wine cellars are at their merriest.



Urška Farm in Križevac near Stranice: Taking part in a grape harvest is a memorable experience.



The biodynamic wine-grower Aci Urbajs lovingly supports nature, nurtures his vines and monitors the natural processes of wine maturation.



The Gruska tourist farm in Buče:
In good company, over good food and wine, it is nice to sing a folk song or two about wine.

The main type of farm here is the family farm focused on wine-growing and tourism. Small producers have realised that providing supplementary tourist services can help sell their wines, some of which are of top-quality.

“Both sides of the river Sotla are mostly characterised by small wine-growers – and this is exactly what makes them interesting. Owing to the very different vineyard microlocations and situations, this area is quite a treasure trove of diversity and exciting discoveries for a connoisseur and gourmet. We have some old vine varieties and plenty of charming, small vineyards and wine-makers who tend their wines with love. They are also increasingly opting for organic wine-growing and wine-making. Our area even has the first Slovenian biodynamic wine-grower, Aci Urbajs, who in 2000

received the right to use the Demeter brand for his wines. This label proves the highest level of harmony with natural rhythms and processes in wine-making, without any oenological additives or sulphur,” says the wine-growing expert Roman Štabuc.

A visit to the local wine cellars will not only reveal wines of high quality and unusual character but also the fascinating personalities of wine-makers as they offer you their finest liquid treasures.

It is hard to imagine a tasting of good wines without excellent cheeses – and fortunately they are plentiful in this area on both sides of the Sotla. Traditional recipes are used to make cheeses from cow's, sheep's and goat's milk, while many cheese-makers also experiment with new aromas and flavours. Oenological gourmets and cheese fans are sure to be delighted!



Picking grapes gives one a sense of bountiful nature.



The sunny Virštanj hills seen from Drensko rebro

Wine-grower Slavko Toplišek: "We are very proud of the long wine-making tradition of Virštanj, which is also proved by one of the oldest grapevines in Slovenia. It grows and still bears sweet grapes on the front of Banovina in Virštanj where the famed Counts of Celje had their wine cellar."



Superior Cured Meat Products

A tasting of stuffed stomach at the Selišnik farm in Podvolovljek



Scraping and turning a drying zgornjesavinjski želodec

In an age without fridges and freezers, the preparation of cured meat products used to be an art that ensured a lasting stock of meat. Sausages, salamis and other cured meat products were – and still are – the pride of every farm household. Proper care of cured meats was usually the responsibility of the master of the farm and their excellence was a matter of personal and family reputation. While following traditional family recipes, producers have also gained modern knowledge and the technology for making truly superb meat products that will not leave even the most pampered gourmet indifferent.

“Cured meat used to be a luxury and was set on the table only on holidays or when a grand visitor or a constable came to the farm as a way of pleasing them. Today, these goodies can be enjoyed more often, but they are still treats with a great deal of work, care and knowledge invested in them. And they are still about prestige and honour – winning an award for meats in competitions is a source of pride for any farmer,” says Branko Petek, the young master of the Pri



Spruce and larch woods in Matkov kot



The granary at the Selišnik farm



A tasting of cured meat products at the Laznik farm in Tabor



Branko Petek is proud of his cured meat products



Adi Laznik in the meat curing room

Selišniku farm in Podvolovljek. “However, we’ve levelled a lot lately and the winners are really decided only by shades of flavour. Trust me; all our meats are very very good!”

In the Upper Savinja Valley, the most highly valued meat delicacy is the *zgornjesavinjski želodec*. The name literally means “Upper Savinja stomach”. It is made of the best and carefully selected pork and bacon, seasoned with sea salt, pepper, garlic water and sugar. It is stuffed into a stomach or bladder and dried for three to five months on wooden shelves, with a constant supply of air that brings in the scent and aroma of the mountain spruce woods. It is given a lot of care and attention, which is decisive for the flavour of this exquisite and precious cured meat. While drying, it is monitored daily, turned and cleaned, and the air moisture and temperature are controlled. This fine speciality bears the European logo for Protected Geographical Indication, a label only given to products made by producers included in the relevant certification process.

It is customary to hand-pick the finest stomach on Easter, boil it and take it to church to be blessed, after which the whole family

will gather for a festive meal. Traditionally it is also served at big celebrations, for example christenings or wedding feasts as a ceremonial food which brings happiness and abundance. Besides the stomach, there are other cured meat products that are a matter of honour and prestige for any farmer, and the best effort will be made to produce the very best meats. On many farms, dry meat delicacies are still dried in a granary, a special building separated from the house and used for storing produce. Preserved old granaries are an important part of the cultural heritage of Savinja Valley farms, and in many places they are conserved as well as shown to visitors with love and pride.

Zgornjesavinjski želodec is an item of food that embodies many elements of the setting where it is made: the sharp Alpine climate, the winds blowing from the mountains, the smell of spruces and fresh spruce wood, the pride and independence of farmers and their respect for the fruits of the land.



The Vrhovski farm in Durmanec: the Zagorje turkey has been listed in FAO's world register of domestic animal breeds since 2000.

Zagorje Turkeys

Many farms in the Krapina-Zagorje County offer the sight of meadows grazed by proud birds with glossy feathers – turkeys. They were introduced in Zagorje back in the 16th century, originally at monastic estates.



Zagorje turkeys at the Kos farm in Sveti Križ Začretje



Traditional Zagorje specialties: Zagorje štruklji, Zagorje turkey with *mlinci*, cured meat products, cheese, wine, apple juice



Maize – food and decoration at the Kos farm

Turkeys were domesticated by the Aztecs, a people of Central America, probably as early as around 200 BC. Domestic turkeys of the *Meleagris gallopavo* species drew the attention of the Spanish conquerors and, according to records, they brought them to Spain in 1511. In the mid-16th century, they were known in most European countries, and by 1561 they were bred by Pauline Fathers in Zagorje. Soon, they were also reared on Zagorje farms; the farmers liked the fact that for most of the year, the birds found their own food by foraging in meadows and orchards.

Five hundred years of turkey breeding in small flocks, mostly free range, produced the only Croatian indigenous breed, Zagorje turkeys, which vary in colour: bronze, grey, an off-white and black. A noted Zagorje speciality – roast Zagorje turkey with *mlinci* (flat bread) – owes its tastiness above all to grazing in meadows rich in diverse plants and insects. Before World War II, these turkeys were highly regarded by European gourmets, and surviving reports show that in 1935, farmers in the Zagorje area raised more than 30,000 a year. Most of them were

exported to the UK, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Belgium, France and Italy.

Traditional breeding of small flocks on farms almost died out after specialised turkey farms gained ground, but in recent years indigenous free-range Zagorje turkeys have become highly valued again – especially under the brand *Puran zagorskih bregov*. The Zagorje turkey also has Protected Designation of Origin status.

Although they mostly graze by themselves, raising turkeys in the traditional way on farms requires a lot of work and love. Turkey chicks are rather helpless and need special care and attention, while grown-up animals need plenty of fresh water and shade, which is provided in pastures by tall fruit trees.

Besides the roast, a number of other turkey meat dishes are typical of Zagorje. Festive turkey dishes spread from the monastic and aristocratic cuisine of Zagorje to the rural population. Christmas dinner cannot be imagined without a succulent roast with *mlinci*.



Roast Zagorje turkey with *mlinci*

Holiday Preparations

Growing food of good quality on a family farm involves hard work and more often than not also worries. Still, farming families have always known how to mix work with company and fun.

Visiting farms is also a charming experience in the winter; is there anything cosier than sitting next to a warm tiled stove after a long walk in snow-covered woods? As the winter begins, so do the many preparations for the Christmas holidays; this is your chance to stay at a farm and learn traditional cooking and other skills: handicrafts, felting, preparing firewood or making Christmas decorations. A weekend that is so rich in content can be enjoyed by the whole family. The winter landscape is also a new, different experience; you can track deer or fox across the fields, and the frosted woods herald the magic of the winter holidays.



Baking a festive *potica* at the Lesjak farm in Šmihel nad Mozirjem: cracking and picking walnuts, rolling the dough, spreading the walnut filling, placing the roll in an earthen baking dish, putting the dish in the oven, fire in the bread oven, baked walnut *potica*



Since times immemorial, haymaking, harvesting, threshing, corn shucking and other chores have been an opportunity for getting together, telling stories, a visit from a musician or singing together. Family farms are particularly festive during important holidays such as Easter and Christmas. That is when the smell of *potica* cake and festive specialities fills the homes. Preparations begin weeks before the holiday, bringing cheer and joy to the family: cracking walnuts, collecting greenery in the woods, painting eggs etc.

The pre-holiday period is a great time to spend a weekend at a farm; the housewives will be happy to teach you how to bake a *potica*, a typical Slovene festive cake. "Yes, of course we'll be glad to give you training – but you'll need to come here, to our farm!"

says the young housewife Ema from the Lesjak farm, laughing. "You know, I'm often asked for recipes, but in our family we never cook from recipes; there are none, it's all a rule of thumb, like my mum taught me. And that's how we can teach you, too."

Many farm housewives as well as culinary specialists will swear that proper *potica* can only be baked in an earthen dish in a bread oven. There is much demand for traditional earthenware, which helps keep the pottery craft alive. So, you should first visit a potter, and then spend a weekend with a kind mistress or master of home cooking with earthenware. You will also get good results with your oven at home, after you have learned a few housewife's tricks.



Painting eggs for Easter



Cooking course at the Loger farm in Ljubno



A weekend at a farm is an opportunity to learn how to prepare traditional dishes. Vilma Topolšek from the Urška farm is passing on the skill of making *ocvirkovka*, bread with crackling.



A blossoming meadow orchard in Šmihel nad Mozirjem

Spring

As soon as the snow melts, the smell of freshly ploughed soil fills the air. The sunny yellow dandelion blooms in the fields, and bird song rings through the orchards. The white blossoms of old tall apple and pear trees flirt with the snow-peaked mountains. As you walk through the woods, you hear the cuckoo for the first time. A proverb says that a person with money in their pocket when the cuckoo first sings will be rich all year. This belief dates back to the time when farmers felled timber in the winter and transported it for sale on rafts during high spring waters – money in their pockets when the cuckoo first sang was a clear sign the year would be a prosperous one.



The Lower Savinja Valley has 1000 hectares of hop fields.



The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes above Migojnice gives a fine view of the Lower Savinja Valley.

Styrian Hops with Protected Geographical Indication

In the past, the Lower Savinja Valley was dubbed the 'valley of green gold' for the hops.



Hop plants grow up to seven metres high from April to the end of June, at the time of the most intensive growth more than 20 centimetres a day.



For 55 years in a row, the Hop Elder and Princess have been voted on Hop-Growers' Day, an event held on the second Sunday in August.

The cultivation of hops gives the landscape its distinct appearance. A hop-growing area is characterised by plantations with tall poles linked by wires. In the summer, when the hop is high, a walk through a hop field is an unforgettable experience. Beer is a very popular beverage, but not all its devotees know that its pleasantly bitter taste and aroma come from hops.

Hop-growing with all the fields and drying kilns has not only given the landscape a unique face, it has also given rise to many traditions and customs, as well as a special dietary culture. Hops need to be harvested at the height of the summer and when still picked by hand, this was a gruelling job. The typical dishes that were made for lunch in the fields were both light and fortifying. The Eco-Museum of Hop-Growing in Žalec offers a range of activities that help visitors learn about and understand both the rich heritage and the interesting present of hop production and beer-making.



Country walks are a chance to admire hundred-year-old apple trees of traditional and indigenous varieties.

Meadow Orchards

Once, every farm used to have fruit trees.



Now open to the public, Radobojski trnec is a meadow orchard restored by the Radoboj Municipality with support from the Public Agency for the Management of Protected Sites of Natural Value in Krapina-Zagorje County

Today, traditional meadow orchards are recognized as an important element of a well-managed man-made landscape, giving it a distinct appearance. In addition, they provide a vital habitat to many living beings in the meadows and tree crowns. Meadow orchards are the reason why bird songs are an inseparable part of the landscape and the farm experience, just like the humming bees and flitting colourful butterflies.

From the Alps to Zagorje, many indigenous and traditional varieties of fruit species still thrive on farms; *bobovci*, *carjeviči*, *kosmači*, *voščenke*, *krivopeclji*, *grafenštajci*, *mošanclji* – are all apples that you will not find on the shelves of large shopping malls. Each variety is distinguished by its unique aroma, acidity level, and they vary by ripening time, durability and use in cooking. They can be used for side dishes, dry fruit or in desserts – a proper apple strudel cannot be made without fragrant home-grown apples! In the Kozjansko area, apples even have their own fete, a yearly showcase for growers of old varieties, masters in making apple strudel, producers of fruit schnapps and liqueurs and other suppliers of treats from farms.

Home-made fruit schnapps can be found in almost every home – domestic schnapps distillation is a century-old tradition. Others run a registered business and they offer a range of excellent and aromatic distilled beverages, based on various types of fruit, fruits of the forest and herbs.



Each year, the Kozjansko Apple Festival draws many visitors to Podsreda on the second weekend in October.



← A competition in making apple strudel for the title of "Strudel Master".

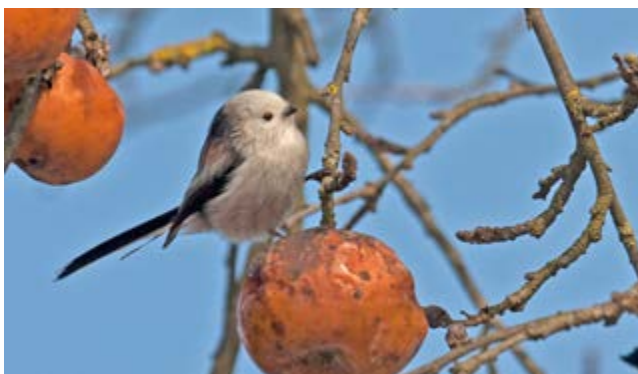
↑ A spring meadow with blossoming dandelions, an apple tree, the town of Ljubno and snowy Mt Raduha seen from Radmirje.



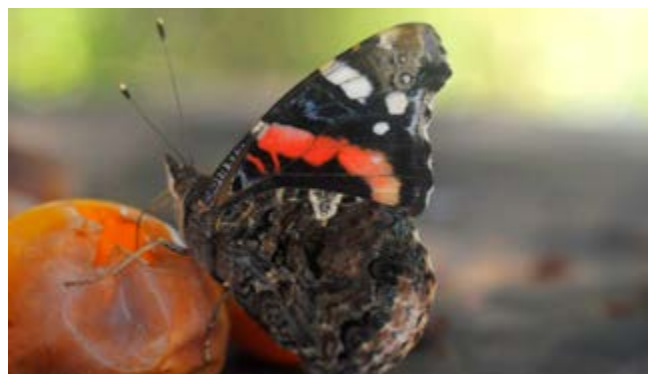
Annual display of traditional and indigenous apple varieties from meadow orchards in Podsreda



At a tasting of schnapps and liqueurs at the Stiplošek farm near Podčetrtek, farmer Jože will tell you many interesting things about schnapps distillation.



Meadow orchards are home to many birds, including some rare species. A long-tailed tit feeding on an apple.



Apples are also to the taste of Red Admiral butterflies.

Lunch with a Difference

Even bread tastes different when enjoyed outdoors!

Summer

Where meadows are still managed in the old-fashioned way, they are full of flowers in the summer. Where there are flowers, there are also bees, bumblebees and colourful butterflies. One can hear the crickets chirp and the skylark singing far above the fields. The bells of grazing cattle echo in the hills, the corn fields dance in the wind... This is the time when blueberries and raspberries can be picked, when herbs are at their most aromatic and the first crops are harvested. This is a lovely time for trips, mountain hikes, boating, cycling and wandering along country roads. In the summer heat, raspberry or elder juice is so refreshing! And a fresh salad with herbs tastes so good!



Andreja Podlesnik from the Kladje organic farm: "Dishes made from fresh organically grown ingredients have a full flavour and high nutritional value. Even a carrot tastes delicious when freshly pulled out of the ground!"



Cattle of the indigenous Slovene breed Cika and traditional Simmental breed thrive on pasture.

You can combine a visit to a farm with a family picnic and treat yourself to some goodies from a basket filled by the farm housewife. Alternatively, you can have a festive lunch in the green shade of fruit trees, refresh yourself on a trip with a snack as you rest on a bench with a view, or take some carefully prepared refreshments with you on a mountain hike.



Lunch in a meadow at the Kladje tourist farm in Ter above Ljubno ob Savinji, with a view of Mt Komen



Children are fascinated by farm animals.



Lunch from a basket at the Bolfan Vinski Vrh wine-growing estate

The flavours and aromas will be different from the usual – all of them delicious! They will stay in your memory, along with the images of the mountains, woods and fields, orchards, farm houses and churches on hillocks. We trust that you will be eager to come back. The hospitable farms will always welcome you.

Home-made specialities from the Alps to the hills of Zagorje

Find out about our culinary experiences, from farm tours, tastings, cooking workshops and lessons on farms, visits to culinary events and enjoying an open-air fireplace, to cross-border culinary trips and picnics in the countryside.



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