



# SUSTAINABILITY REPORT OF VELENJE 2023–2025

**Period: 2023–2025**

## When sustainability becomes a shared story of people

Velenje is not a destination that *has* sustainability. Velenje is a community that *lives* sustainability – through its decisions, its development pathways, and its relationship with people and place.

This report covers the period from 2023 to 2025 and summarises the key processes, changes and impacts of the destination's sustainability efforts. The Šalek Valley, which for decades grew with the energy of labour and coal, is today courageously stepping onto the path of green transformation – towards a city of the future, where development is defined primarily by quality of life, care for nature and responsible use of resources.

During this period, sustainability was strengthened as a shared story of people and place. The most significant shift was that sustainability did not remain at the level of plans, but increasingly became part of everyday life. Systemic approaches were reinforced – from circular solutions and waste reduction to initiatives that encourage more thoughtful habits and responsible use of resources.

Sustainability in Velenje is created through cooperation – between the municipality, public institutions, companies, associations and residents. The greatest strength of Velenje lies in its committed and warm-hearted people – the faces of sustainability who turn change into practice.

The European Green Leaf Award 2024, together with related European funding, further strengthened awareness campaigns, citizen engagement and activities that bring sustainability closer to people in a clear and practical way. At the same time, this period places Velenje within the broader European context of climate-neutral and smart cities.

Special attention was devoted to sustainable tourism – tourism that delivers high-quality experiences while minimising environmental impact. Sustainable practices were integrated into guided tours, experiences, events and cooperation with local providers, while responsible mobility, use of local products and a respectful attitude towards space and community were actively promoted.


This report is more than a review of completed activities. It is a confirmation of the chosen development path and an invitation to continue – ensuring that sustainability remains a living process, co-created together in the community, in space and in tourism.





## VELENJE IN FIGURES


**Methodological note:** The indicators are based on data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURS), the NiST – National Information System, municipal records, the destination’s internal databases, and partner institutions. Interpretation emphasised the quality of growth and its impact on place and the local community.


 **Community as the driver of development:** more than 2,200 voices of key stakeholders collected.


 **Higher value creation in tourism:** revenue from accommodation activities increased from €22.94 million (2022) to €29.27 million (2024) (+27.6%).


 **Growth with purpose:** arrivals increased from 11,691 (2022) to 16,048 (2024) (+37.3%), and overnight stays from 27,904 (2022) to 38,172 (2024) (+36.8%); growth was accompanied by visitor management measures and sustainable practices.


 **Higher value added per employee:** from €29,900 (2022) to €38,700 (2024) (+29.4%).

 **Visitor experience: 88–91%** of visitors report satisfaction; in 2025, more than 90% of respondents expressed the intention to return.

 **A symbol of transformation:** the renovated, green and accessible **Velenje Beach**, recognised as one of Slovenia’s best urban natural bathing areas.

 **Less waste, more leadership:** reusable cups reduced waste by up to 60% at selected events.

 **Moving in the right direction:** sustainable mobility is becoming part of everyday life – the Bicy bike-sharing system grew from 7,811 rentals (2022) to 9,159 rentals (2025).

 These indicators demonstrate measurable changes in habits, space and the community.

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## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

### Tourism and sustainable practices

- **Entente Florale Europe 2024 – Gold Medal** for sustainable tourism and leisure.
- **Destination Crisis Management Plan.**
- **Guidelines for Green Events in Velenje.**
- Introduction of **sustainability criteria in public calls for proposals** (tourism, culture, Mayor's call).
- **Training for providers:** certification, carbon footprint measurement, efficient use of water and energy, responsible communication.
- **Green habits at the city market** (own reusable bags, exchange of preserved foods).
- **Thematic green guided tours** and development of new sustainable products (year-round experiences).
- Development of the **destination's gastronomic pyramid.**

### Sustainable mobility

- New cycling route **Štrekna** – connecting Velenje with Carinthia.
- **Vista Mobility Plan** for integrated sustainable mobility of the area.
- Sustainable transport solutions: **Bike Bus, Štrekna Bus, Lokalci, BICY, GreenGO, bike rentals.**

### Infrastructure and circular economy

- Establishment of the **“Library of Things” (Nucarnica)** within the Reuse Centre.
- **Waste Management Strategy until 2030.**
- **Promenade of Flavours** and **Pippi Festival** – events on the path towards Zero Waste.
- **Tree Management Plan** – care for more than **8,800 trees.**
- **Climate and Energy Office** as a support point for green transition.

### Uniqueness (ours, heartfelt – with clear social impact)

- **Green Informers – our green forces:** a unique intergenerational programme where seniors and youth promote environmental awareness and sustainable habits at events and in public spaces; the programme has a strong educational and social impact.
  - **Eco-remediation islands** in Lake Velenje.
  - **New experience “Under the Surface”** – a dive into history that disappeared from maps but remains in collective memory.
  - **“Podamo si dlani”** – a song (music video) as an artistic tribute to the Velenje Green Leaf, a symbol of green transformation.
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## ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATES AND AWARDS

- **Slovenia Green Destination GOLD**
  - **European Green Leaf Award 2024**
  - **EU Mission: 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities**
  - **Golden Stone Award 2024**
  - **Entente Florale Europe – Gold Medal 2024**
  - **My Country – Hospitality Label 2025**
    - 🏆 **Hostel Velenje** – Slovenia Green Accommodation
    - 🏆 **Vila Bianca** – Green Attraction, Green Key
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## RECOGNISED SUSTAINABLE STORIES

- *Secrets of the Sunken Villages* – among the **6 best sustainable stories in the world** (Destination of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Awards / ITB Berlin).
  - *Secrets of the Sunken Villages* – **Slovenia Unique Experience (SUE)** label.
  - *Underground Adventure in Huda Luknja* – **Hidden Gems of Slovenia Award 2024**.
  - **Golden City Gate 2025** – two silver awards for promotional videos (sustainable destination and local gastronomy).
  - *Undiscovered Stories of the Mill Valley* – selected as **Slovenia's Hidden Gems** (example of visitor dispersion and sustainable experience).
  - **EVA App** – ranked among the **Top 3 environmentally friendly services** (digital support for sustainable habits).
  - New promotional film: *“Velenje Invites – A City of Opportunities for All Generations”*.
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## FACES OF SUSTAINABILITY (proud of our people)

Sustainable results are not achieved through investments alone. People are key: employees, volunteers, associations, partners, providers and residents who co-create the destination experience every day.

**Velenje listens – and then acts.**



**Urška Gaberšek** – Slovenia Green Coordinator of the Year 2025.



**Marija Brložnik** – President of the Velenje Tourist Association, recipient of the Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Tourism Associations 2024.



## **CHALLENGES (honest and development-oriented)**

- Evening culinary offer after 10 p.m. – an opportunity for partnerships and new concepts.
- Limited shopping opportunities – an opportunity for local products and boutique offerings.
- Accessibility of public transport on weekends and public holidays – an opportunity for improved solutions.
- Seasonal pressure in the lake area – continued visitor management and experience dispersion.
- Adaptation to heatwaves, storms and droughts – an opportunity for more resilient offerings and spatial adaptation.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

Velenje follows the vision of a green, sustainable and smart destination that sets high standards for the future. Our mission is a clear commitment to protecting nature, improving quality of life, and fostering innovative and responsible sustainable tourism.

Together, we are building a green future – through actions that create long-term positive impacts on space and the community.

**Velenje | December 2025**