

## SUSTAINABLE LUXURY

COUNTRYSIDE LODGE BALANCES COMFORT AND ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS



*Over a decade ago, two Dutchmen, Jeroen van Drunen and Lennard de Klerk, moved to Hungary and came up with the idea of creating a luxurious, eco-friendly holiday resort in Irota, a village in the northeastern part of the country.*

» “We first discovered the area in 2007 when we were helping a friend renovate his countryside cottage. Somewhere in the back of our heads was this romantic idea of renovating a dilapidated mansion in the middle of nowhere and starting a small, eco-friendly holiday resort. We fell in love with the Cserehát region with its beautiful hills, and our first online search led us to exactly the house we envisaged, in exactly the village we hoped for: a beautiful, tiny village in a valley, at the end of the road, Irota,” Jeroen van Drunen recalls to Diplomacy&Trade.

### Sustainable hospitality

The EcoLodge the two Dutchmen created aims to set an example for the home-based hospitality industry by showing that luxury and a sustainable lifestyle can complement each other perfectly. As Lennard de Klerk explains, “we are convinced that luxury and a sustainable way of life go well together. With Irota EcoLodge,

we are proud to be the first in the sustainable hospitality industry in Hungary and, so far, the only climate-neutral holiday accommodation in this country – and probably in the wider region, as well. When we designed the Lodges, we applied the latest available environmental technologies. For example, we have the first commercially-operated natural swimming pool in Hungary, which does not use chlorine, but natural reed to purify the water. The bearing structures are made of wood, which is a reusable material. Between the wooden structures, 15-cm thick cellulose has been blown in as insulation material, which is made of used newspapers. Rain water is collected to flush the toilets and to supply the washing machine. This way, we save up to 60% of our tap water. Rainwater is also used to replenish evaporated water in the swimming pool. And, of course, we have solar panels and collectors to generate electricity and hot water with the sun.”

### Unspoiled nature

Irota is a small cul-de-sac village, populated by around a hundred people. However, there is a lot to see and experience in the village and the broader environment. Jeroen highlights that “first of all, there is unspoiled nature. Hours of walking without running into other tourists, how awesome is that? Additionally, we are close to the Tokaj wine region and the spectacular cave complex in Aggtelek National Park. Miskolc, with its Diósgyőr castle, beautiful Lillafüred and the cave baths of Miskolctapolca are not far, either. For those who want to venture over the border into Slovakia, we recommend a visit to the attractive city of Košice (Kassa in Hungarian). And there is much more.



“We are always happy to suggest some hidden gems.” In summary, Lennard says they recommend this lodge as a holiday destination for those who are interested in enjoying nature without giving up on luxury. “For them, Irota EcoLodge is the ideal destination. We allow people to bring their pets. Also, each house is suitable for the physically challenged and includes a wheelchair-accessible bathroom.”

### Corporate clients

The lodge is suitable for corporate purposes, as well, like team-building, incentive programs or conferences for high-end decision makers. As Jeroen puts it, “we offer something different from the standard business retreat. Our corporate guests will be far away from the daily hustle and bustle, but with all modern conveniences at their disposal. If they want to prepare their meals together, our well-equipped kitchen will offer everything they need. If they don’t, the best cook in the village will bring her tasty dishes to them. We can invite a sommelier from Tokaj with his wines for a tasting, provide them with mountain bikes for a wonderful outdoor experience and organize trips in the area including transportation – everything tailor-made, so their wish is our command.”

### Returning guests

Construction of the premises of the Irota EcoLodge was finished in 2016. “Feedback from our guests is very positive, so far. In particular, Hungarians marvel over the fact that such a beautiful place exists in a relatively disadvantaged corner of the country. And we have many returning guests, some of them having been with us two or three times already. Our average rating on booking.com is 9.8 (classified as ‘exceptional’) which is quite illustrative,” Lennard points out. Regarding plans to expand the business, Jeroen stresses that they are not so much thinking about expanding, but rather about improving. “The small-scale character of our resort is one of its main attractions, so, we don’t want to tamper with that. Since we do not see this venture as a quick money maker, but as a business model for the future, we hope to improve our efforts along these lines. Our next steps will include an electric car which we will be able to feed with our home-generated solar energy. Also, we want to expand the production of organic food we have recently started. This will hopefully give our village an extra boost, as well.”