

dutch focus



A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL, PEACEFUL RESORT

IROTA ECOLODGE SUITABLE FOR FAMILY HOLIDAYS AND BUSINESS PURPOSES

Ten years 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 here.

➤ Back in 1993, Jeroen spent half a year in Hungary studying and he “absolutely fell in love with the country and Budapest and I always vowed I would be back one day. Later, I spent ten years in the Dutch diplomatic service. Meanwhile, my partner, Lennard, who had a business trading CO₂ emission quotas. We ended up in Budapest in 2007. I was working on my PhD and, in the meantime, met an old friend of mine, an American guy who happened to have a holiday home in the village of Szalonna, close to the Slovak border up in the northeast. He was renovating that place, we offered our help and that was the reason we first went to that area, to enjoying our time there almost every week-end during the summer,” he explains to Diplomacy&Trade. He adds that they had already been thinking of setting up a business in rural tourism, featuring luxury and eco-friendliness with the big question always being ‘when’ and ‘where’.

Eco-business in rural tourism

Lennard de Klerk says that with the ‘where’ largely decided as they liked the landscape where they helped their friend, they were looking for a mansion that they could renovate and make it into the home they were dreaming about. “We found one that had been empty for two decades in Irota, a dead-end village of less than a hundred inhabitants situated in a valley. It took us 2-3 years to renovate it. As I was in the environment business, it was very interesting for me to put ecology into practice, applying new technologies.” After they finished the renovation of the mansion, they continued with the construction of the resort. The walls of the ecolodge resort’s three separate villas (each reflecting a different style) are made of wooden-frames in which cellulose, made of used newspaper, has been blown as insulation material. On the outside, wooden soft board plates have been used to increase thermal insulation. “We installed a large stove in the central room, fed with locally grown firewood, to provide heating, which is sufficient due to the insulation we have used including the triple glazing and in general, we applied much of the experience gained when we renovated the mansion.” In the ecolodge, rainwater is collected to be used to flush the toilets, to wash the laundry and fill the

swimming pool, which means 50-60% savings on water consumption. Water is heated by solar collectors while the electricity provided by solar panels is more than enough, so, the surplus is fed to the grid of the electricity company. Jeroen stresses that no chemicals are used in the swimming pool as it has a separate reservoir in which reed cleans the water. Also, each villa is equipped with a biological wastewater treatment unit that uses bacteria to clean the water before it is re-introduced to nature, which is important as the village – like most of them in the area – does not have its own sewage system.

Local attractions

The Dutchmen also contribute to the local community by “employing two ladies who help us in cleaning the villas and two gentlemen who do the upkeep of the swimming pool and help us with small repairs,” Jeroen says. While Irota, itself provides the peaceful setting guests come for (the place is on a national hiking path and the ecolodge owners provide mountain bikes for free), Lennard explains that the recently renovated palace that can be visited in nearby Edelény, Aggtelek (with its famous Karst caves) is a UNESCO World Heritage Center and the world-renowned wine region, Tokaj are not far away, either. “We have an arrangement with a sommelier to give a guided tour in local wineries (including wine tasting) to those interested but if requested, he can also bring the wines to Irota.” Another local feature is the wide array of bird species awaiting bird watchers from Hungary and abroad. The resort is suitable for corporate purposes, as well. “The houses (each providing accommodation for up to six people) are technically well-equipped. In case of a team-building trip, the one in the middle can be used for meeting with the other two for sleeping. The place is self-catering



(with outdoor kitchen including the overall favorite Hungarian cast iron goulash kettle ‘bogrács’), but we also have a lady in the village who is a very good cook, so, she can prepare traditional meals on request,” Lennard adds. Construction of the premises was finished last year. As to what sort of feedback they have from guests, so far, Jeroen proudly says that “everyone has left the place happy. We have had very good reviews on travel websites, as well. People especially like the fact that they can have luxury in a remote place where they would never expect it. Funnily enough, we mainly expected foreign visitors but 90% of them have been Hungarians. Basically, from the moment we opened to the end of the season, we were fully booked.”

He adds that “for longer periods, I would expect more people from Western Europe, especially those looking for the unspoiled countryside. It would also be very interesting for expats in Budapest who are looking for a place to stay far from the hustle and bustle sites where people usually go to.” **D&T**



Look around the Ecolodge
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www.irotaecolodge.com



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