

KONJENIŠKI TURIZEM V OBČINI IVANČNA GORICA: ZASNOVA NOVEGA TURISTIČNEGA PRODUKTA

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Povzetek

Turizem in šport se prepletata že od antičnih časov ter danes predstavljata velik del vsakdanjega življenja. Tako nas različni turistični produkti vabijo k potovanju do turističnih destinacij, ki gostom nudijo, kar si želijo. Konjeniški turizem je dobro razvit in raziskave so pokazale, da je gostom najpomembnejša povezava z naravo in razgledi. Občina Ivančna Gorica ima velik potencial za konjeniški turizem, saj je v občini veliko narave in razglednih točk, ki bi privabile takšne goste. Glede na velik razvoj konjenišstva po svetu smo se odločili zasnovati nov turistični produkt v občini Ivančna Gorica, ki ima veliko konjeniških ponudnikov in razvit športni turizem ter s tem potencial za ta turistični produkt. Namen prispevka je bil ugotoviti možnosti za razvoj konjeniškega turizma v občini Ivančna Gorica in zasnovati idejo novega turističnega produkta. Opravili smo raziskavo z intervjuji, ki nam je postavila temelje za vzpostavitev novega turističnega produkta, povezanega s konjeništvom. Temeljni pojmi v raziskavi so bili: konjenišstvo in turizem, narava in kultura, unikatnost in sodelovanje, elementi konjeniških poti ter dobrobit konj. Zastavljene idejne zasnove za konjeniške poti vsebujejo elemente poti, tehnično izvedljivost in označbo ter opis pričakovanih rezultatov poti.

Ključne besede: športni turizem, konjeniški turizem, konjenišstvo, konjeniške poti, Ivančna Gorica

EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF IVANČNA GORICA: DESIGNING A NEW TOURISM PRODUCT

Abstract

Tourism and sport have been interwoven since ancient times, and today they form a significant part of daily life. Various tourism products encourage travel to destinations that offer visitors the experiences they seek. Equestrian tourism is well-developed, with research indicating that guests highly value connecting with nature and scenic landscapes. The Municipality of Ivančna Gorica has strong potential for equestrian tourism, boasting abundant natural settings and viewpoints that would attract this audience. Considering the global growth in equestrian activities, we decided to design a new tourism product in Ivančna Gorica, which features several equestrian providers and a well-developed sports tourism sector, creating favourable conditions for such a product. This article aims to explore the possibilities for developing equestrian tourism in Ivančna Gorica and to conceptualize a new tourism product. We conducted a study with interviews, which provided a foundation for establishing a new equestrian-related tourism product. The core concepts in this study included equestrianism and tourism, nature and culture, uniqueness and cooperation, elements of equestrian trails, and the welfare of horses. The proposed trail designs include elements of the routes, technical feasibility, and signage, along with a description of anticipated trail outcomes.

Keywords: sports tourism, equestrian tourism, equestrianism, equestrian trails, Ivančna Gorica

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1 INTRODUCTION

Today, sport is more than just a physical activity; it offers people opportunities for socializing, relaxation, and serves as a profitable business and income source for tourism destinations and sports organizations. Sport's popularity and appeal make it a significant social phenomenon, and it can be seen as a driver of an active and healthy society, often taking time away from rest and other activities. The sports sector, broadly defined, serves as a growth engine for the European economy, creating additional value, opening new jobs, and encouraging innovation and development (Lesjak, Sikošek, & Kerma, 2020). Sport and recreation are also crucial parts of the tourism sector (Lesjak, 2018).

A tourism product is a mix of tangible and intangible elements, including natural, cultural, and artistic resources, attractions, facilities, services, and activities around a core area of interest. This core is central to the destination's marketing strategy and creates the visitor's overall experience, including emotional aspects. Tourism products are created, sold through distribution channels, and have a life cycle (UNWTO, n.d.). Developing tourism products is crucial to meet tourist demands and ensure the industry's long-term profitability. The product must meet market demands, be cost-effective, and rely on the destination's cultural and natural resources (Smith, 1994). Tourism products may include services like horseback riding, making it clear that these products depend on horses. Historically, horses were a component of transportation systems globally, whether for personal, commercial, or military purposes. In most developed Western nations today, however, horses are bred primarily for recreation. Like other outdoor recreational activities, horseback riding is incorporated into various tourism products worldwide. As with other forms of tourism, these products vary in price, location, and the level of experience required. Products range from short, easy trails over flat terrain to multi-week horseback safaris in remote mountain or desert regions, and even working vacations on ranches, where guests are expected to have a strong background in horseback riding. Other equestrian tourism products include carriage rides or viewing equestrian sports, such as demonstrations or competitions. The author defines two main categories of products in equestrian tourism: ecotourism and experiential tourism, and farm or agritourism. Horse-related tourism largely falls under rural tourism (Ollenburg, 2005).

Agritourism and farm tourism differ. Agritourism provides accommodation separate from the farming environment, while farm tourism involves participation in farm activities. Under this definition, horseback riding with family members on a farm would fall under farm tourism. Thus, horse tourism requires land, farm facilities, and staff trained to work with horses (Clark, 1996). Nature is a primary element of equestrian tourism, especially for tourists who own horses and those who rent them. After nature, the horses themselves are the next most important element (Tolls & Carr, 2020).

Tourism that includes horses is a significant and growing sector within the tourism industry, yet it remains under-researched. In their study, the authors found that this type of tourism entrepreneurs identify more with equestrian culture than with the business-oriented tourism culture. The study, based on interviews with horse tourism business owners and operators, reveals that these individuals, often referred to as equestrians, are deeply involved in breeding, training, and riding horses, and expect their guests to share this passion. Although focused on Iceland and the Icelandic horse, the study suggests that these findings are applicable elsewhere (Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2008). A study on riders' preferences and economic value concerning equestrian trails in the United States reveals that riders are willing to travel a certain distance and spend money on these trails, but this depends on the distance

and cost. Riders would also travel longer distances for extended, scenic trails rather than multiple shorter ones (Hu et al., 2014).

Tourism significantly contributes to the visibility of the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica. The municipality comprises 12 local communities: Ambrus, Dob pri Šentvidu, Ivančna Gorica, Krka, Metnaj, Muljava, Sobrače, Stična, Šentvid, Temenica, Višnja Gora, and Zagradec (The Municipality of Ivančna Gorica, n.d.). Numerous cultural heritage sites can be found here, such as the Jurčič Homestead, the Old Town Centre in Višnja Gora with the House of the Carniolan Bee, the School Museum, the Cistercian Monastery in Stična, the Museum of Christianity in Slovenia, one-sided hay racks, the Nose Ethnological Collection, Illyrian and Roman heritage, and various churches and chapels (Pleasantly Local, 2023c). Sports tourism and active sports tourism in the municipality include water and underground experiences, hiking, cycling, adrenaline adventures, and experiences in a pristine green environment with animals (Prijetno domače, 2023a). This study focuses on experiences in a pristine green environment with animals, highlighting farms and ranches potentially involved in managed equestrian trails.

The first ranch, NiceRanch, is located in the village of Trnovica above Hrastov Dol. The ranch offers various workshops, courses, and social events focused on handicrafts, cuisine, and equestrianism. The second, Ranch Prebil, is located in Temenica in Šentvid pri Stični. Its primary activity is equestrianism, featuring three outbuildings for horse care and accommodation, an outdoor riding arena, and an indoor arena. For gatherings, the ranch offers an indoor club space for up to 80 guests and overnight accommodation, earning the title of Organic Farm in 2019. Next is Pristava Tourist Village, connected by the Pristava Tourist Village Trail, which encompasses four farms: the Okorn Excursion Farm, the primary culinary provider; P'r Tonijevih Farm, offering motorhome parking, a holiday home, and a picnic area; P'r Mežnarjevih Farm, selling agricultural products; and P'r Lampret Farm, specializing in beekeeping. In Radenja vas in Šentvid pri Stični lies Rogačeva Farm, which has been breeding Slovenia's indigenous Lipizzaner horses for a decade and offers carriage rides. Čož Farm in Leskovec near Višnja Gora provides motorhome stops, an apartment, glamping, homemade sweets, and cured meats, horseback riding, carriage rides, and a Cowboy Land featuring a children's playroom, outdoor games, cowboy games, and a cowboy-themed restaurant (Prijetno domače, 2023b).

The Municipality of Ivančna Gorica has substantial potential for equestrian tourism, given its natural beauty and scenic viewpoints that appeal to such visitors. The equestrian trails would thus connect the natural and cultural heritage sites. The research aims to determine the possibilities for developing equestrian tourism in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica and to create a concept for a new tourism product. This product could serve as an additional offering for service providers and as a new product for the destination's tourism organization, attracting a new target group of visitors to Ivančna Gorica.

In the research, we addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the current state of sports and equestrian tourism in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica?

This question provides insight into the current state of sports and equestrian tourism in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica, serving as the basis for developing a new sports-tourism product. Sports tourism combines sports and tourism. Sport is defined as physical exertion and skills governed by specific rules (Oxford University Press, 2024). It plays an important

role in developed societies, influencing politics, economy, culture, and health (Jarvie & Thorton, 2012). Equestrian tourism includes leisure activities with horses and donkeys, taking place outside one's usual residence for more than a day but less than a year (Pickel-Chevalier, 2025). Sports tourism in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica begins with the Ivančna Gorica Sports Organization Association (2024), as there are numerous clubs, and sports infrastructure is being developed, including a new sports park and various sports fields throughout the municipality (My Municipality, n.d.).

RQ2: What elements should a tourism product, specifically a managed equestrian trail, contain to be an appropriate sports-tourism product in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica?

This question supports developing a suitable sports-tourism product by identifying the elements necessary for it to appeal to potential visitors or tourists, as well as existing service providers in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica. As a best practice example, we examined Strmol Equestrian Club (2019), which offers seven managed equestrian trails marked for difficulty, distance in kilometres, water stops, tie points, and tourist points.

RQ3: How can a tourism product featuring a managed equestrian trail be integrated into the existing offerings in Ivančna Gorica?

This question examines how to integrate a new sports-tourism product into the existing offerings in Ivančna Gorica. The sports-tourism product in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica includes various providers involved in cuisine, equestrianism, culture, and nature. This question helped identify potential collaborations and approaches. Equestrianism is developing in Ivančna Gorica, with several providers, such as NiceRanch, Ranch Prebil, Rogačeva Farm, Cowboy Land Čož, and Rock Ranch (Prijetno domače, 2023a).

2 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH RESULTS

The theoretical part of this paper involves content analysis, aiming to clearly define terms and establish a basis for further research (Kordeš & Smrdu, 2015). The primary method chosen for the research component of the paper was interviews, a qualitative research approach.

For this research, we conducted 8 interviews — 6 in person and 2 via email — between June 17, 2024, and August 9, 2024. We invited 8 interviewees from the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica, including individuals from the Prijetno domače Institute, NiceRanch, Tourism Village Pristava, P'r Tonijevih farm, Rogačeva farm, and Čož farm. Additionally, we interviewed an individual involved in a similar product offering through the Strmol Equestrian Club, as well as two individuals from the equestrian community. The aggregated results provide answers to the research questions and offer insights for product development based on interviewee feedback, including demand and existing offerings.

2.1 Responses to research questions

Based on our research, we reached the following conclusions for the key research questions:

RQ1: What is the current state of sports and equestrian tourism in Ivančna Gorica?

Sports tourism in Ivančna Gorica is developing, with the municipality investing in new infrastructure and supporting projects such as Cukarca Adventure Park, which offers numerous sports activities. The sports infrastructure includes various gyms, outdoor courts, sports parks, and numerous marked hiking and cycling trails. The popularity of sports is

evident in the number of sports associations within the municipality. The hiking and cycling trails are maintained by sports associations composed of volunteers, indicating a strong local commitment to sports and new sports products. Equestrian activities are also well-developed, with several equestrian associations, clubs, and ranches offering riding schools, camps, trail rides, guided trail rides, pony sessions, and more. All interviewees agreed that an equestrian trail product aligns well with the region and expressed a willingness to collaborate.

RQ2: What elements must a developed equestrian trail product include to serve as a suitable sports-tourism offering in Ivančna Gorica?

An equestrian trail product should include horse tie-outs, drinking stations (or access to rivers), grazing or feeding options, clear trail markers, and information on the trail surfaces, lengths, and difficulty levels to allow riders to select and prepare appropriately. For riders, it is essential to have rest areas, such as benches and nearby dining options. For multi-day trails, interviewees emphasized the importance of accommodations that allow horses to stay untethered overnight, such as pasture, paddock, stalls, or fenced areas with access to food and water. Interviewed equestrian providers expressed interest in participating in the trails. Most already offer accommodations for both horses and humans, including tie-outs, feed, and some dining options. They would also be open to guided trail riding, leading groups on their (loaned) horses along the trails with optional sightseeing stops.

RQ3: How can the developed equestrian trail product integrate with the existing tourism offerings in Ivančna Gorica?

Existing tourism providers in Ivančna Gorica have already begun connecting and working on a comprehensive product at the initiative of the municipality. Many interviewees supported the equestrian trail idea and mentioned having previously considered such a project, although it had yet to be implemented. The trails would be fitting for the region, as the vision of the local culture and tourism institute, *Prijetno domače*, aligns with a focus on nature and sustainability. The extensive network of hiking and cycling trails already suggests that sports tourism is both well-developed and popular. This equestrian tourism product could complement existing products promoted at the Ivančna Gorica Tourist Information Centre. Here, guests would have access to maps and information on tourist points of interest and dining options along the trails, with maps available in Slovenian, English, German, Italian, and Croatian.

2.2 Discussion of results

Kurtzman (2005) categorizes sports tourism activities into three groups, with equestrian trails fitting into sports-tourism tours. Such trails also fall under active sports tourism, as participants engage in physical activity along the trails (Gibson, 1998, p. 49, in Lesjak, 2028, pp. 32–33). We also examined sports and equestrian tourism in Ivančna Gorica in the theoretical section. In an interview, Maja Lampret stated: “In addition to the numerous hiking trails already mentioned, the high number of sports associations — over 170 in total, including 24 cultural, 12 tourism, and many sports associations — illustrates significant public interest.” This breadth of sports associations and new infrastructure demonstrates the growth of sports in Ivančna Gorica. The wide range of sports and activities in the municipality indicates a successful development.

According to Kotler (1994), a tourism product should include three main elements: core services, special features, and supplementary services. For equestrian trails, the core service is a trail suitable for riders and carriages; special features include markers, tie-outs, drinking

stations, and more; and supplementary services involve provider networking and organization of additional services like tourist tours and experiences. We illustrated the sports-tourism product through the example of loop trails in the Municipality of Rogatec by the Strmol Equestrian Club. These trails feature maps marking watering stations, tie-outs, rest areas, points of interest, and the difficulty and length in kilometres (Strmol Equestrian Club, 2019).

The Municipality of Ivančna Gorica emphasizes a holistic approach to destination development. The director of the local cultural and tourism institute Prijetno domače highlighted that effective development requires cooperation between the private and public sectors. Ivančna Gorica (n.d.) consists of 12 local communities with a blend of cultural and natural heritage and diverse sports activities. According to interviews with providers, all were eager to collaborate on an equestrian trail product.

3 EQUESTRIAN TRAILS AS A NEW SPORTS TOURISM PRODUCT IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF IVANČNA GORICA

We defined eight different equestrian trails. Each trail will have marked length, difficulty, surface type, designated tie-up and watering points, dining options, accommodations, and attractions. Each route will be displayed on a master map as well as individually.

The trails will include information on their suitability for riders and carriages, with details on length in kilometres, difficulty (easy/moderate/difficult), and surface type (gravel/asphalt/forest trails). An easy trail is suitable for riders independently navigating at a walk and trot; a moderate trail is suitable for independent riding at a walk, trot, and canter; and a difficult trail requires riders to handle obstacles and longer distances at various gaits. Tie-ups will be located at shaded stops and near tourist points.

3.1 Single-Day Circular Equestrian Trails

Single-day circular routes will be designed as simpler trails.

The first single-day route includes the following path:

Ivančna Gorica – Vir pri Stični – Pristavlja vas – Šentvid pri Stični – Ranch Prebil – Temenica – Dob pri Šentvidu – Ivančna Gorica.

This trail is suitable for both riders and carriages, with sufficient width and accessibility. It passes by Grofija Homestead, Vir Spring, and Ranch Prebil. In Šentvid, visitors can find Rogačeva Farm and Cukarca Adventure Park. Grofija Homestead offers accommodations, a tennis court, RV space, and dining options. The farm hosts fallow deer, horses, and goats, and provides insights into local history with attractions like Cvinger, a human fish at Vir Spring, and an ethnographic collection. Ranch Prebil offers western riding training. At Rogačeva Farm, guests can enjoy wine tasting from Debeli hrib, and in Cukarca Adventure Park, they can test their skills on the park's adventure courses. Dining options along the route include Gostilna pri Japu, Gostilna Štorovje, Pizzeria Kegeljček, and Hit Burger and Pizza.

Length: 21.4 kilometres.

Difficulty: Easy.

Surface: Asphalt and gravel.

The second single-day route includes the following path:

Kavbojska dežela Čož – Leskovec – Stiški potok – Mala Dobrava – Velika Dobrava – Sela pri Višnji Gori – Kavbojska dežela Čož.

This trail is suitable for both riders and carriages, accessible by both. It mostly runs through shaded areas near water, beginning and ending at Kavbojska dežela Čož (the only dining option along this route) and passing the Stična Monastery. Kavbojska dežela Čož offers accommodation for horses and riders, food, and a children's play area. Stična Monastery, with its rich history and herbal pharmacy, also houses the Slovenian Christianity Museum.

Length: 18 kilometres.

Difficulty: Easy.

Surface: Forest trails, asphalt, and gravel.

The third single-day route includes the following path:

Leskovec – Obolno – Debeče – Pristava nad Stično – Cukarca Adventure Park – Gradišče (Lavrič Lodge) – Stična – Višnja Gora – Vrh pri Višnji Gori – Leskovec.

This trail is suitable for riders only, as the paths on Obolno Hill and through Debeče are not carriage-friendly. The route passes Obolno Peak (the highest in the municipality), Tourist Village Pristava, Cukarca Adventure Park, Lavrič Lodge, Stična Monastery, the House of Carniolan Bee, and Kavbojska dežela Čož. Tourist Village Pristava consists of four farms where visitors can arrange meals, snacks, or pastries and learn about the history of Virida Visconti. Lavrič Lodge offers tie-ups for horses, food, and drinks. The House of Carniolan Bee provides accommodations, a café, and exhibits on the Carniolan honey bee and the Rothschild family. Dining options along the route include Turizem Obolno, P'r Okornu – Tourist Village Pristava, Lavrič Lodge at Gradišče, Šerek in Višnja Gora, and Kavbojska dežela Čož.

Length: 27.7 kilometres.

Difficulty: Difficult.

Surface: Forest trails, asphalt, and gravel.

The fourth single-day route includes the following path:

Muljava – Zagradec – Ambrus – Bovljek (Mali Korinj) – Krka – Muljava.

This trail is suitable for riders only, as the paths around Bovljek are not carriage-friendly. The route includes stops at the Josip Jurčič Homestead, Krka River Spring, travertine terraces, Krka Cave, and the Nose Ethnographic Collection. The Josip Jurčič Homestead presents insights into his life and 19th-century rural life. The Nose Ethnographic Collection houses old farming tools and artifacts.

Dining options along the route include Homestead Javornik in Krka and Gostišče Krka, both located in Krka.

Length: 24.1 kilometres.

Difficulty: Moderate.

Surface: Forest trails, asphalt, and gravel.

The fifth one-day trail would cover the route:

Višnja Gora – Kriška vas – Polževo – Muljava – Ivančna Gorica – Višnja Gora.

This trail is suitable for riders and carriages, as it is wide enough and accessible for carriages. The route passes by the House of the Carniolan Bee, the viewpoint at Polževo, the Ethnological Collection of Nose, and the Jurčič Homestead. The hospitality providers along the route are Šerek in Višnja Gora and Hit Burger and Pizza in Ivančna Gorica.

Length of the trail: 21.5 kilometres.

Difficulty level: Easy trail.

Trail surface: Forest paths, asphalt, and gravel.

The sixth one-day trail would cover the route:

Dedni Dol – Višnja Gora – Vrh pri Višnji Gori – Gorenje Brezovo – Leskovec – Sela – Stari trg – Višnja Gora – Dedni Dol.

This trail is suitable for riders, as the paths leading to the waterfalls are not suitable for carriages. The route passes by the Višnjica and Kosca waterfalls, Cowboy Country Čož, and the House of the Carniolan Bee. The hospitality providers along the route are Šerek in Višnja Gora and Cowboy Country Čož.

Length of the trail: 17.8 kilometres.

Difficulty level: Moderately difficult trail.

Trail surface: Forest paths, asphalt, and gravel.

The two-day circular equestrian trails would represent more challenging routes.

The first two-day trail would cover the route:

Ivančna Gorica – Muljava – Krka – Ambrus – Zagradec – Trnovica (overnight at NiceRanch) – Dob pri Šentvidu – Temenica – Sobrače – Šentvid pri Stični – Metnaj – Stična – Velika Dobrava – Višnja Gora – Ivančna Gorica.

This trail is suitable for riders and carriages, as it is wide enough and accessible for carriages. On the first day, the route passes by the Nose Ethnological Collection, the Josip Jurčič Homestead, the source of the Krka River, the source of Poltarica, Krška Cave, and the limestone thresholds; on the second day, it passes by Ranch Prebil, Rock Ranch, Stična Monastery, and the House of the Carniolan Bee. The hospitality providers along the route on the first day are Domačija Javornik and Gostišče Krka; on the second day, they are Pizzeria Kegeljček, Gostilna Štorovje, Gostilna pri Japu, Šerek in Višnja Gora, and Hit Burger and Pizza.

Length of the trail: 69.8 kilometres (31.6 kilometres on the first day and 38.2 kilometres on the second day).

Difficulty level: Difficult trail.

Trail surface: Forest paths, asphalt, and gravel.

The second two-day trail would cover the route:

Polževo – Zavrtače – Velike Vrhe – Muljava – Bojanji vrh – Male Pece – Artiža vas Stična – Sela pri Višnji Gori – Leskovec (overnight in Cowboy Country Čož) – Obolno – Debeče – Pristava – Gradišče – Stična – Višnja Gora – Polževo.

This trail is suitable for riders, as parts of the route are not suitable for carriages. On the first day, the route passes by the Jurčič Homestead and Stična Monastery; on the second day, it passes by the highest peak in the municipality, Obolno, the Tourism Village Pristava, Stična Monastery, and the House of the Carniolan Bee. The hospitality providers along the route on the first day are Cowboy Country Čož; on the second day, they are Turizem Obolno, Lavričeva Koča, and Šerek in Višnja Gora.

Length of the trail: 51.2 kilometres (26 kilometres on the first day and 25.2 kilometres on the second day).

Difficulty level: Difficult trail.

Trail surface: Forest paths, asphalt, and gravel.

Funding for the trails would be sought through a public sports or Interreg grant if developed in multiple municipalities, potentially as a cross-border initiative. The municipality or hired personnel would manage the trails initially, with future management possibly by local associations and trail users.

Maps or signs will help visitors orient themselves. The map will indicate if a route is suitable for riders only or also for carriages, with difficult sections like road crossings marked along the way. Trails will be color-coded for difficulty: yellow for easy, blue for moderate, and red for difficult. Other information will include surface types (gravel, asphalt, forest trails) and tourist attractions along the routes. Signs will be installed along trails where guests might stray from the path.

On these trails, visitors will find marked tourist attractions they can visit upon request, tie-ups, watering points, and dining options. Riders can navigate the trails independently, organizing their preferred attractions, meals, and accommodations in advance. Guided tours are also available, potentially led by instructors from Kavbojska dežela Čož, who already offer guided trail riding.

The grand opening of the trails would feature a selected route, showcasing the trail concept. Each year, an event to celebrate the Equestrian Trails' Anniversary would feature new developments and improvements to the trails, followed by a music event with food and drinks. Initial promotion of the trails will target the local region, expanding to Slovenia and internationally if interest arises. The trails will be promoted at tourism fairs, equestrian events, and via digital channels. Online promotion will feature a new Equestrian Trails Ivančna Gorica website, as well as the "Prijetno domače" website, and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Ivančna Gorica, with its strong interest in sports tourism as shown by its numerous sports associations, is a developing tourist destination. Equestrian sports are gaining popularity, with rising interest in arena and trail riding and popular horse camps. All interviewees agree that such a product would be highly welcomed in the municipality, fostering provider collaboration and creating a cohesive product. This product aligns with the vision of the "Prijetno domače" brand, promoting provider cooperation and a return to nature and sustainable living.

Equestrian trails offer worry-free paths for riders and carriages, allowing users to choose suitable routes based on length (in kilometres), difficulty (easy, moderate, difficult), and surface type. Trails are mapped and accessible on the "Prijetno domače" website, managed by

the Public Institute for Culture and Tourism Ivančna Gorica, and available in print at the institute's headquarters and other local tourist providers. The maps highlight the municipality's attractions, visible from horseback, along with tie-ups, watering points, accommodations, and culinary options. This tourist product contributes to Ivančna Gorica's tourism offerings, bringing in a new target group of visitors, fostering sustainable tourism, and integrating local natural and cultural resources with sports tourism.

4 CONCLUSION

Through this research, we developed a new tourism product for the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica. We divided the equestrian trails into eight distinct routes, including six single-day and two two-day trails. Numerous cultural and natural heritage attractions are located along these routes. Our findings indicate that sports tourism, including equestrian activities, is well developed in the municipality. Based on the number of sports clubs and support for outdoor sports products, such as hiking and biking trails, the residents of Ivančna Gorica are willing to engage and participate in outdoor sports activities. We believe that existing providers would likely collaborate to create a comprehensive equestrian trails product.

The equestrian trails must be well-marked and equipped with tie-up points and water sources for horses, as these conditions were most frequently emphasized by stakeholders. Additional requirements include suitable trail surfaces, rider-friendly dining options, and scenic natural landscapes. The trails are further enhanced by the inclusion of tourist attractions.

The research objectives were to define sports tourism and clarify the profile and types of sports tourists; present equestrian sports tourism; describe the characteristics of a tourism product; showcase the tourism offerings in the Municipality of Ivančna Gorica; conduct a study and present results through interviews with current providers, the municipal tourism organization, potential new providers, and prospective tourists (new target groups); and, based on these findings, create a new tourism product. This includes designing an organized equestrian trail, listing the involved existing providers, mapping the route, outlining signage, and offering implementation suggestions and possible improvements. We achieved these objectives.

There is still significant potential for improvement in these equestrian trails. A key development would be establishing an agency to organize, manage, and maintain the trails and provide guides, as we believe the current routes primarily serve those already familiar with equestrianism. Expanding to appeal to people interested in discovering equestrian activities is also essential.

This study did not address the legal or land-use aspects of the trails. Future efforts should assess whether usage permits or only landowner permissions are required and determine whether these trails intersect with the municipality's hiking and biking paths. Conceptual design work would also be necessary for enhancing the product.

A comprehensive upgrade could involve developing a conceptual plan for equestrian trails across other municipalities, leading to an integrated product for Slovenia as a whole. These trails would be mapped across Slovenia, creating connections among municipalities and providers in different regions.

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