



Photo by  
Katja Borns

## CITY, COUNTRY

Tolmin, Slovenia

## DAILY CAPACITY

12,000

## SITE

Sotočje, where two rivers meet in a forest

## CAMPING

Yes

## NUMBER OF DAYS

5

## ESTABLISHED IN

2013

## GENRE

Metal

## CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Engaging with a diverse audience through subtle communication







## FAMOUS METAL ARTISTS AMONGST THE PRISTINE SLOVENIAN NATURE

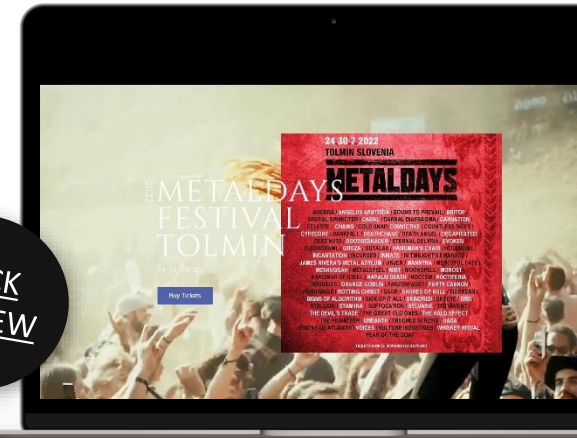
Innovation and hospitality have been central for MetalDays since it started in 2013 and even longer for its creators, Nika Brunet and husband Boban Milunović. Visitors regularly come from more than 70 countries to the festival site Sotočje (Slovenian for “junction”), which lies within a forest. At the site, two mountain streams, Soča and Tolminka, meet amidst untouched Slovenian nature near the town of Tolmin, which has a population of just 3500.

Despite its remote location, MetalDays is the biggest festival in Slovenia and one of the leading metal festivals in Europe, attracting world-renowned bands each year. Brunet calls MetalDays “a true pioneer among festivals”. This is because they have invented the concept of combining music events and holidays. As well as this, they have set ecology and sustainability standards that are now followed by many other festivals.

One of these standards is the garbage deposit, a fee that visitors pay with their ticket and that they can reclaim after they

have cleaned up their camp sites and returned their filled trash bags once the festival has finished. It is a measure that Brunet recommends every festival puts in place. “It gets our audience to participate in keeping the festival area clean,” the event manager says.

In addition to this, visitors are supplied with biodegradable tent pegs, which can be left in the ground. Cutlery and tableware is biodegradable, toilet paper and napkins are made of recycled and organic materials, and 50% of meat and dairy have been replaced with vegan food. The festival has also built drinking water pipelines throughout the site (eliminating the need for bottled water) as well as a new sewage and drainage system that reduces the number of plastic chemical toilets used. These are only a few measures implemented at MetalDays.





## COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY TO A DIVERSE AUDIENCE

According to Brunet, two challenges stand out amongst the many that MetalDays has faced over the years: financing and communication. As the festival is independent, with no sponsors or other financial support, Brunet and Milunović pay for sustainability initiatives out of their own pocket. “My husband and I like to joke that we have invested enough for two nice family houses in Ljubljana, Slovenia,” Brunet says. Was it worth it? “That is debatable. I like to think that one of the reasons visitors love our festival so much and love to come back every year is also because of the work we do to create a more sustainable festival with a smaller environmental impact. For us personally, there was simply no other option. If the

question is more about the financial aspect, the answer for sure is: no, it did not pay off.”

The idea of creating a sustainable festival is reflective of Milunović and Brunet’s personal beliefs; both, for instance, live completely vegan. “My husband and I try to live a sustainable life 365 days a year, so we thought that our festival should be no different.” Convincing 12,000 visitors from all over the world, ranging between 20-50 years old, to accept these beliefs is definitely a challenge, but “with the right approach and education of our visitors, we have come really far,” Brunet adds.

“

One of the reasons visitors love our festival so much [...] is also because of the work we do to create a more sustainable festival.



## SOMETIMES SAYING LESS IS MORE

A lesson learnt by the couple is that sometimes too much explanation can backfire.

When they began introducing plant-based food, many visitors, according to Brunet, were aware that she and her husband are vegans. “So, when we had our first vegan food stand at the festival, we got comments like: ‘you are pushing your own personal beliefs and lifestyle onto us, you will not succeed, and it will only go

downhill from here.’” Instead of changing their minds about the decision to introduce plant-based food, they simply stopped explicitly advertising the vegan options. “Now our communication is more like: ‘look, here’s a delicious burger, there are plenty of great, healthy food options at the festival, so come and enjoy.’”



**Now our communication is more like: ‘look, here’s a delicious burger, there are plenty of great, healthy food options at the festival, so come and enjoy.’**

Photo by Katja Borns



## RETURNING TO THE 5-YEAR PLAN

Pre-pandemic, the festival had created a 5-year plan towards an even greener and cleaner festival, called “Green MetalDays”.

The measures included:

- Replacing diesel generators with power connectors and introducing pre-pitched cardboard tents (‘Electric Funeral Project’, 2019)
- Banning single-use tents and offering biodegradable ones instead (‘BIG Tent Revival Project’, 2020)
- Introducing free parking for car-sharers (‘Green House Effect Project’, 2020)
- Creating an on-site supermarket and being package-free, (‘Toxic Garbage Island Project’, 2021)
- Replacing most chemical toilets with eco and permanent solutions (‘Drainpipe Project’, 2022)
- Going 100% plant-based with local organic products (‘Reclamation Project’, 2023).

Sadly, however, Green MetalDays came to a halt due to the pandemic. As the festival is independent, it will likely take a few years to get it back on track, Brunet says.

The festival is facing other challenges that require solutions, such as the construction of the Tolmin bypass. The looming construction of the highway road will impact the site as it will split the festival area in two. “With the rising price of production costs and bands, we will have to wait and see how things will evolve,” Brunet concluded.



“

**With the rising price of production costs and bands, we will have to wait and see how things will evolve.**