

## **Interview with Matevž Pretner, transcript for »Voices along the Via Alpina«, in August 2025**

Hello and welcome to this episode of the *Voices along the Via Alpina Trail* podcast. For 25 years, the Via Alpina has connected people, cultures, and landscapes across the entire Alpine arc. Our multilingual podcast series tells its story, highlights the challenges and opportunities of long-distance hiking, and raises awareness about sustainable tourism in the Alps.

My name is **Katarina Žakelj**, and I come from Cibra, Slovenia. In this episode, I speak with **Matevž Pretner**, who lives with his family in Trenta, within Triglav National Park, where he represents the second generation to operate an organic agro-tourism farm. The Via Alpina hiking trail runs right through their valley. We talk about tourism in a protected area, the relocation of his family's farm due to a rockslide, and, of course, his experiences along the Via Alpina.

---

**Katarina:** Hello, Matevž!

**Matevž:** Hello.

**Katarina:** How would you introduce the Via Alpina to someone who has never heard of it?

**Matevž:** As far as I know, it's a very long trail that traverses the entire Alps. To those unfamiliar, I'd describe it as a truly long-distance hiking trail. Here in Slovenia, the better-known Alpe Adria Trail is much shorter than the Via Alpina.

**Katarina:** Do you have any personal connection or story related to the trail?

**Matevž:** Not directly. I've never planned to hike the entire route. Among our guests, there are few who cover the whole trail. Still, some complete parts—most often from Trenta to Tamar and across the Triglav Lakes Valley. That section is very beautiful and well-designed by Slovenian standards. I've met people who've hiked a large part, but I don't think I've met anyone who's done the full trail end-to-end.

**Katarina:** Do you host Via Alpina hikers at your farm?

**Matevž:** Absolutely. Our farm focuses on tourism for hikers and families. We offer accommodations suited for both day-trippers and multi-day guests—simple and affordable.

**Katarina:** Your farm is located in Trenta valley near Plajer, inside Triglav National Park, through which the Slovenian leg of Via Alpina passes. Your family had to move the farm in the 1980s because of a rockslide. What happened?

**Matevž:** The rockslide didn't damage any buildings, but the area became dangerous—rocks still fall occasionally today. So we had to relocate. Finding a new site for both the house and farm was very difficult. My father and grandfather nearly gave up, until a cousin sold us a parcel on which we now stand, where we've built both the farm and tourism facilities. The whole process was very demanding—especially obtaining permits, since construction in that area is strictly regulated. At that time, even Yugoslav authorities considered evacuating the valley, turning it into a kind of uninhabited nature reserve. We feel fortunate to have stayed.

**Katarina:** And are you personally glad to have stayed in Trenta?

**Matevž:** Yes, I wouldn't go anywhere else.

**Katarina:** How would you describe Trenta to someone from elsewhere in the Alps?

**Matevž:** I would say it's one of the steepest Alpine valleys. Narrow and steep—the Soča River flows at around 800 meters above sea level, and the surrounding peaks rise above 2,000 meters. It's a valley of strong contrasts. The lower part is forested, while the upper part is rugged and rocky. It has a special charm. It may remind some of valleys in the Central Alps, but unlike those, Trenta is inhabited year-round, which is quite unique.

**Katarina:** What role does being on the Via Alpina route play for your farm?

**Matevž:** It's not a major income source on its own, but hikers do pass by routinely, whether they know it's the Via Alpina or not. The trail includes well-known sections like the Triglav Lakes, Triglav summit, Kriški Podi, and Vršič Pass. People often hike from hut to hut. We host many visitors who start at Tamar or in Trenta, then continue to Pogačnikov Dom, Dolič, Zasavska Koča ... Hiking quite literally supports us financially.

**Katarina:** What key guidelines should hikers follow in Triglav National Park?

**Matevž:** Above all, they should avoid disturbing wildlife—ibex, chamois, marmots, eagles, and so on. And, of course, they must carry out all their waste. Each year, Trenta organizes cleaning campaigns, and every year we collect fewer trash. It seems we're maturing as a community. We don't have major issues with hikers—most problems come from motorized access. Hikers themselves are mostly respectful.

**Katarina:** The Via Alpina is a sustainable tourism initiative. How has slow tourism evolved in your region?

**Matevž:** I'd say it's still developing. Over the past 10–15 years, serious discussions about sustainable tourism have begun, particularly after visitation in Trenta spiked post-2012. Managing increased visitor numbers brought challenges—traffic, infrastructure, etc. I don't think we're fully where we should be yet, but we're heading in the right direction.

Three key areas where I see progress:

**Limiting visitor numbers**, especially in large campsites. Fewer people means less litter, reduced wastewater, and a better experience overall.

**Public transport** is still in its infancy. We need more routes to reduce car use.

**Wastewater treatment** – we’re the only farm here with a plant-based purification system. All water from our kitchen and lodging runs through an eco-treatment system. I hope others follow suit.

Nature also gets a “rest” outside the season, but that shouldn’t excuse a lack of sustainable investments.

**Katarina:** Taking time to walk, engage with nature and locals—it can influence your views on tourism, the environment, and your habits. Long-distance hiking can thus become a form of awareness. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Via Alpina. What do you wish for its future?

**Matevž:** I wish the trail continues to connect people, valleys, and regions. It’s not just a physical route—it’s a cultural and social link. Let’s maintain inhabited valleys, allowing visitors to hike daily from one valley to the next, hopping between huts. That’s not automatic in many places. The Alps must remain living spaces—culturally, too.

**Katarina:** The Via Alpina crosses eight countries: Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, France, and Monaco. I agree—Alpine settlement isn’t a given. Thank you deeply for contributing to keeping the Alps vibrant, and I wish your farm continued success!

**Matevž:** Thank you very much.

---

This concludes my interview with **Matevž Pretner**, who lives along the Via Alpina in Trenta valley within Triglav National Park and manages an organic agro-tourism farm. To listen to more episodes of *Voices along the Via Alpina Trail* or learn more about the project, please visit our website: [www.cipra.org](http://www.cipra.org).

New episodes will be added throughout the year. I’m **Katarina**—thank you for listening!