



DISCOVERING
HIDDEN ATTRACTIONS

KLOS ARTISANS



THE EUROPEAN UNION CROSS BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME





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PREFACE

mission

The regions of Pelagonija in North Macedonia and Diber in Albania have some of the greatest potential for the development of a dynamic and sustainable tourism offer in the CB area.

ALBANIA



The possibility to capitalise on these cross-border assets is provided within the frame of the Cross-border Cooperation Programme between the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania, co-funded by the European Union–IPA 2 instrument and the Ministry of Local Self-Government of North Macedonia. Both Demir Hisar (MK) and Klos (AL) municipalities, are rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage and diverse natural landscapes that are favourable for a variety of outdoor experiences for the visitor, especially as they are located within an hour’s drive of the main destination hubs of Bitola and Tirana along the newly built Rruga Arberit highway.

The problem addressed by *Discovering hidden attractions* is the under-utilisation of the man-made and natural potential of the CB region as a means to increase the number of visitors to the territory of the two municipalities, and their length of stay and spending on various activities, thus engaging the local population in business activities, resulting in an increase in incomes and reducing youth unemployment.

Discovering hidden attractions focuses on developing consolidated travel packages across the border. Development of similar attractive destination factors in the two municipalities and products of active tourism, including hiking, cycling and local experience gathering delivered by locals, culminates in a joint CB travel package that motivates visitors to go beyond borders and explore untouched places offering a unique, single thematic destination in a two-country travel experience.

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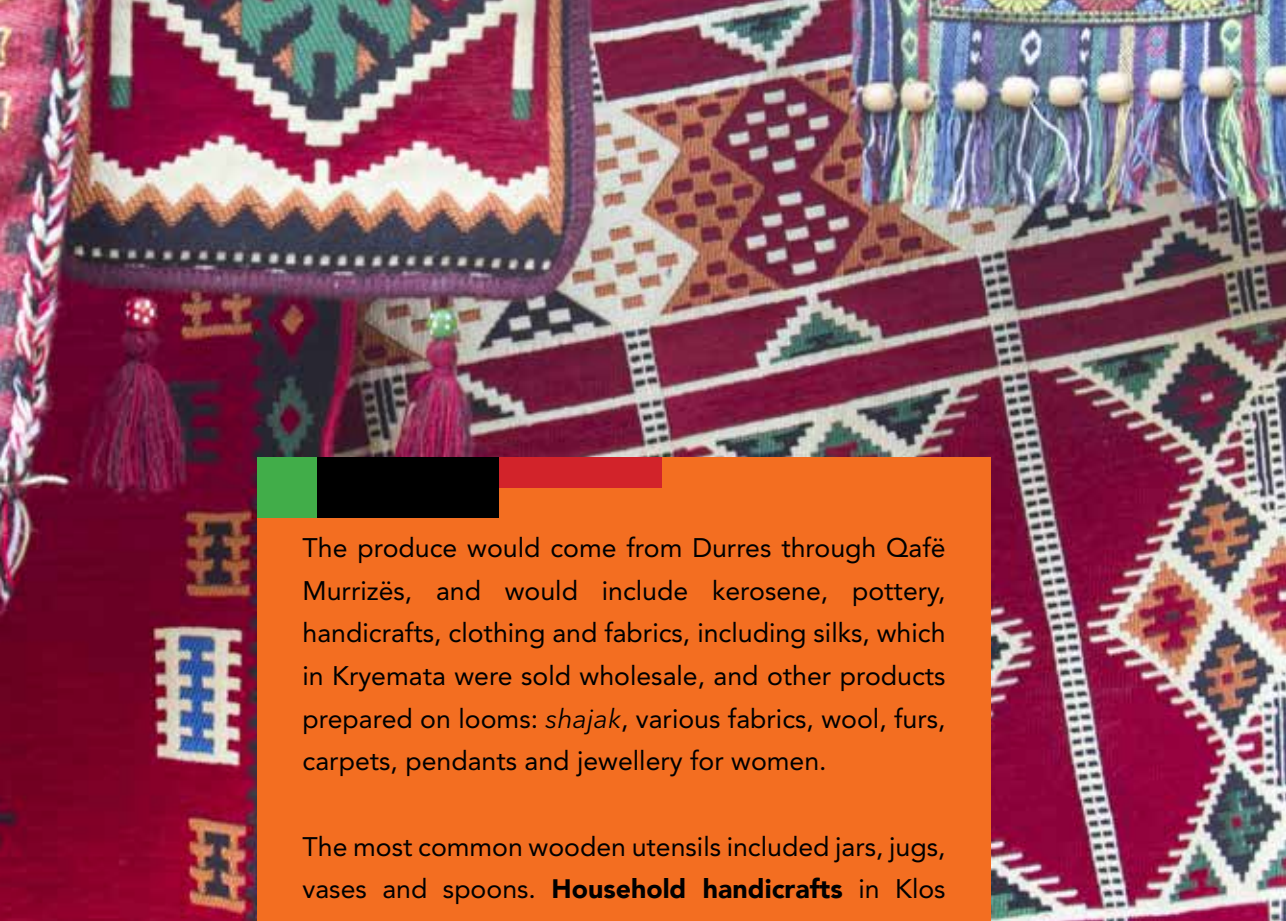
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History of artisanry *in Klos*

Klos is known for its rich tradition of precious handicrafts, created for centuries by master craftsmen, according to the characteristics and specifics of the different geographical areas, excelling in the aesthetic appearance of objects that are generally handmade. The works of wood, stone, metal, wool, silk, clay and pottery stand out and are symbols of the Albanian national identity. These values, passed down from generation to generation, always arouse great interest among local and foreign visitors and researchers, at various exhibitions or fairs.

In Klos, there was the **Bridge Bazaar**, where in addition to the villagers from the immediate vicinity of Klos, villagers from Xibri, Guri i Bardhë, Suç, Kurdari, Martanesh, Bulqize, Zerqan came to trade. Sellers came from all over Diber County, Elbasan, Tirana, Kruje and Durres. At Bridge Bazaar, numerous agricultural and livestock produce and, importantly, salt would be sold.



The produce would come from Durres through Qafë Murrizës, and would include kerosene, pottery, handicrafts, clothing and fabrics, including silks, which in Kryemata were sold wholesale, and other products prepared on looms: *shajak*, various fabrics, wool, furs, carpets, pendants and jewellery for women.

The most common wooden utensils included jars, jugs, vases and spoons. **Household handicrafts** in Klos

occupied an important place in the material life and culture of the inhabitants; not only because they were a necessity, but also because they suited the social and natural conditions. Life based on an agricultural and livestock economy made necessary the need for processing wool typically sheared from sheep.

Women would weave a wide range of fabrics. Almost all mastered the use of the common machinery for weaving woollen fabrics: *tellare*. These looms (*avlemend*) would make woollen fabrics for clothing, carpets and rugs with beautiful ornaments and decorations. A huge range of products were made from wool, in addition to the linens (for shirts) and leather goods (shoes). The wool was lined and pressed with a tool called a *gerhane*, shaped by hand, placed on a spindle and spun with a needle and shaft according to the particular item to be made. The spinning was undertaken according to the type of material required. Spinning tools, forks and shafts were made by local men, who engraved carvings and even made a range of types of fork, with two or three prongs. After the weaving in the *tellare* was completed the resulting fabric was taken to the *valanica*, compacted further and finally take on the shape of the *shajak*. The printing of the *shajak* was typically done in the valley of Lic in Bejn and Bebe in Dars.



Klos had an early tradition in the production of natural silk through the cultivation of the **silkworm**. With the silk thread, high quality fabrics were produced which were in great demand, especially for bridal dresses. With the mass production of industrially produced fabrics, hand production of silk gradually decreased.

At one time in the villages of Klos, **flax** was planted and processed. The name *lintat* still in use today comes from the former use of linen cloth. The production of linen fabrics ended in the time of Zog, with the introduction of mass produced cotton fabrics made in Italy and elsewhere.

Opinga (*poulaine* or *winklepicker shoes*) were also in fashion and made from cowhide, for both men and women. A large needle was used to sew the *opinga*. A ring (a strip up to 50 cm long and approximately 0.5 cm wide) was inserted into a hole and the leather cut along the leg and sewn sideways, gradually turning it so that the toes turned upwards, beyond the tips of the toes.

Gunpowder production

Gunpowder first began to be produced in Mat about 500 years ago. The colour is typically black and branded as Mat Gunpowder. The workshops for production were located in Kryemata below Petralba Castle and beside the nearby streams. Production was undertaken in simple workshops utilising the energy of water but also the strength of the arm. The workshops were called Gunpowder Dinga as a result of the sound made during the production. The gunpowder was used widely, for pistols



and rifles, cannons, and breaking rocks, among others.

The *dinga* comprised *vigu*, sheets that were set in motion by the flow of water, metal shafts, slats, pulleys and choppers, set in limestone slabs where the beating of the material took place.

The raw materials comprised potassium nitrate (*gjyrgjylja*), 75%; sulfur, 10%; and charcoal, 15%.

The gypsum and sulfur were usually imported from Italy though there was also some local production. The charcoal was produced from local willow, poplar and hazelnut wood. Mat Gunpowder was traded in the markets of Diber, Prizren, Gjakova, Shkoder, Durres, Elbasan,

Tirana, Berat and as far away as Ioannina and elsewhere in the Balkans (Rumelia). **Today**, the region of Klos remains one of the most secluded and undiscovered areas of the Albanian highlands, to foreign and local visitors alike. The widespread phenomenon of mass migration that swept over the country in the last 30 years and the general lack of infrastructure have left the area somewhat neglected.

Although to the disadvantage of the few remaining families, this negligence does come with its perks: nature, produce and artisanry are preserved in their most primitive, original form, untouched by time or outside influences. The general tendency of moving towards the city, industrialisation and rapid production has cost Klos some of its rich artisanry, yet an enthusiastic group of crafts people remain. Their skills and locations are listed below. At today's tempo, slow craftsmanship and such a level of authenticity are admirable and a rare gem, not to be missed when visiting the area.

Where <input type="checkbox"/>	Who <input type="checkbox"/>	What <input type="checkbox"/>
Guri i Bardhë	Sefije Kaceli	Folk wear weaving
Patin	Sadik Dema, Avdyl Kaja	Wine
Kurdari	Flogert Merxira	Wine
Suç	Hasan Kuka, Shefki Haxha, Sisters and Women of Suc	Honey; dairy workshop; embroidery

Women's folk dress of Guri i Bardhe

Centuries-old works of art with a strict code



When visiting Guri i Bardhe, be prepared to be halted multiple times on the way. The few remaining, friendly inhabitants won't let anyone, be it neighbour or visitor, go past without offering a Turkish coffee or a glass of homemade *dhalle* (a traditional, refreshing yogurt drink). The simpler their home, the more generous they are.

Going from one house to another, one detail brighter than the pure white houses and the blooming rose bushes stands out: the women all wear red or fuchsia headscarves, with patterns reminiscent of typical Indian motifs of peacock feathers and flowers. While it's not uncommon to see country women wearing white head scarves as protection from the sun, this flashy version of a typical 'old lady' garment is definitely an eye catcher. When asked about this exceptional cloth, the women of Guri i Bardhe will tell you it's just the *Rize Kalemqare*, a second-class wrap of their three pieces of headscarf, not even the most special one among their folk wear.

The folk dress of Guri i Bardhe might not be familiar across the country, but true connoisseurs and everyone in the Klos area know it well. It's an intricate ensemble with multiple layers and distinct accessories to be worn on special occasions, and every woman in the village has her own full set. The material used the most for the clothes is wool, a villager's go-to material for practicality, the more expensive versions are made of linen and velvet and embroidered with golden threads. They are rich in colour, red and yellow being the most dominant, followed by white, blue, green, fuchsia and black.

The details of the costume have been preserved carefully throughout centuries; a major role in this is played by the Guri i Bardhe tradition to keep marital



relations within the area. There's a strict code to follow, passed on from one generation to the next, defining who can wear what based on social and marital status. Working women would wear fewer layers and more practical clothing made for field work, while the richer women would wear more layers made of more luxurious materials. When it comes to jewellery, there is a clear distinction between young and old, single and married, mother and grandmother, with jewellery focused on the woman's stage of life.



Among the pieces that stand out, there is the *Lbade*, the top jacket with long sleeves to be put on last. It is made of velvet, black and heavily embroidered with golden threads. Gold, as an indicator of a family's wealth, is a recurring theme: *Speka* is a heavy necklace, a gift from the bride's family to their daughter on her wedding day: the 33 gold coins weigh it down. When the young couple becomes independent and moves away from the groom's family, they can use the coins from the *Speka* or sell it as a complete item, should they fall on hard times. Other accessories, such as *Vatha e Gushes*, a tighter necklace for young girls, and *Tufa Gsheti*, jewellery for their braided hair, are made of silver, as is



the heavy buckle on the second belt (yes, there are two) they put on top called *Brez me Tasa*. The wool socks are each a masterpiece in their own right and is where the weaver's talent is displayed: the precisely aligned patterns and bursts of colour make it difficult to believe that this is all worked by hand.

If you want to see a rare show of folk dresses and dances, and a centuries-old tradition coming to life, don't miss out on the Guri i Bardhe Village Fest, held each August 15th. It takes place at Gurrat e Gurit të Bardhe in the Kodra neighbourhood, and everyone is welcome to join.



Sefije Kaceli

The golden hands preserving traditional costume weaving

A single visit to Guri i Bardhe puts the whole village on display. Multiple neighbourhoods spread across the hilltops and mountain slope, going up and down you get a taste of the inhabitant's daily life and the village's living past. Between the abandoned tower houses and the overgrown, meandering alleys, the haunting phenomenon of mass immigration becomes clearer. The biggest worry, apart from loss of the potential of the new generation, remains loss of tradition, especially the rich artisanal work developed over centuries that risks falling into oblivion with the youth losing interest.



The intricate Guri i Bardhe costume remains one of the most highly praised values of the area, with exceptional fine work on each of its many layers and to be worn following a strict code. In the lowest inhabited neighbourhood of Guri i Bardhe, by Dish Stream, the last master of costume weaving lives with her husband. Sefije Kaceli's daily job is garden work and taking care of the cows and chickens. At special request, mostly from the nostalgic Guri i Bardhe diaspora, she sits on her big loom and creates pieces of art, not getting up until satisfied with the result. One piece of clothing can take her up to two full days of work.



Her specialty is the various clothing layers for cradles. Apart from the ones she gives away, she still keeps the ones of her own children. Brez is the mid layer that keeps the baby warm. *Shkullaje* is the cover for the head.

Shpergaje is another binding strip to put on top of the midsection. Balkore is the cover for the feet. All are made of wool, the best material for a villager's clothing to this day. Other breza and the Rize Magje (a stylish apron for women, not made for ordinary garden or kitchen work) she makes in linen too. Looking at the antique loom and then at the quality of the cloth, one can only wonder how much fine work stands behind the process.



Sefije proudly presents a model of the Guri i Bardhe women's folk costume she keeps at home. Other sets are dispersed around the globe, with some selling for EUR 2,000. She will gladly let you try the home-model on, but don't confuse the order of wearing the layers, she will not take it well: the code of the costume is deeply rooted in Gur i

Bardhe culture, especially among the elders.



Among other work she mentions are the rug hook carpets with wool strings that are trending lately; the Klos region made it first and called it *flokje* (hair). Now, with not so many requests at hand, she weaves smaller objects, like scarves and wool slipper socks with unbelievably diverse patterns. A Guri i Bardhe original design is the wool socks

with a big *Narcissus poeticus* flower woven at the centre. If you plan to visit Guri i Bardhe, have an Albanian speaker call Sefije ahead to request a little souvenir; you might leave with the most special gift of all.

Sefije and Ramazan Kaceli's house is located in the lowest part of Guri i Bardhe, above Dish Stream. From the centre, enter the alley of Kulla e Dezhqint, and 100 m further down you will find Sefije.

Sadik Dema

Searching for Sadik in Patin, the neighbours will point you to a three-storey villa with dark red bricks and spring green walls with the double-headed eagle of the Albanian flag in the front. The house stands in contrast to the man who lives in it, as one understands when one meets the modest Sadik. But once he gets to talking about his produce, he doesn't stop.



Since 2003, Sadik has been producing wine and raki without a major break. He is a local winemaker who got into oenology after completing professional high school for agriculture. In his cellar, the technology remains basic, the same as when he started, but then so has his price. Remembering one of his best years, he recalls producing up to 3,500 litres of wine. In his vineyard, projected as a 'tent', you can find Merlot and Cabernet, which he processes as pure wines and also as a blend. He also produces raki, which he says is a good way to not let any grapes go to waste, as the high percentage alcohol drink doesn't mind overripe fruit. Of course, no chemical fertilizer is used.

Sadik sells to his established network of customers and to whoever passes by his house and is interested. Wine making is mainly a hobby to him now in his older years. He hopes that one day, his sons will return from England to work in the family business.

*You can find Sadik in Patin.
If you have no luck with the map, ask around:
everybody knows him.*



Sisters of St. Dorothy and the women of Burrel

Creating handcrafted gifts to lift themselves out of poverty

Sisters Liliana, Giusi, Chiara and Paola of the St. Dorothy Order of Bergamo moved to the highlands of Klos ten years ago. Ever since, they have lived and served in St. Nicholas Church in Suç, which coexists in perfect harmony with the adjoining Camping "Oasi alla Chiesa". The children of the region, who otherwise lack training possibilities outside of school apart from the agricultural work for their poor households, know the sisters well. They gather there every day after school, have a blast around the football field for a couple of hours then continue with a dedicated after-school programme, assisted by local teachers, to be later dropped off at their village further away.

The sisters are not only committed to the education and healthy development of children, they have also initiated a project helping marginalised women in the Klos region. On the outskirts of the city of Burrel, which has about 15,000 inhabitants, there are small and old houses where families of the Egyptian minority live in conditions of extreme poverty. Near these houses the sisters saw children and young people left to themselves, at the mercy of chance or on the way to petty crime. Girls of age 11–12 years drop out of school and get married at 15–16. Some young women,



mothers, cannot read or write and are unable to manage the house, raise their children in a healthy environment and with proper education and protection, and even become victims of domestic violence. In this context, two years ago they started a course for 12–17 year-old girls, offering them the opportunity to socialize and learn the art of sewing. The course consists of four main activities: an alphabetization course for young mothers, starting a sewing workshop to carry out small paid jobs, cooking and household economics for girls and women and the insertion and school support for children up to four years in the nursery school and the continuation of the after-school service for children of age 6–11 years.



The sewing workshop is from where all the beautiful, handcrafted gifts you see in the pictures come, such as greeting cards, notebooks, bags and purses. All the money gained from sales goes to supporting the girls. What doesn't get sold is gifted to the community.



Flogert Merxira

The young oenologist who stayed

Those who have been around villages in Albania know that the youth have a tendency to leave their homes for the city or try their luck abroad. This is not the story for Flogert, who at 27 years of age is an established vintner living in his home village of Kurdari, together with his young family.



The vineyard that today occupies 2 ha of land was started by Flogert's father in 1995. With his brother being a fan of computers and his sister focusing on helping around the house, Flogert was his father's only assistant. Growing up, taking care of the vines and running through the family's farm, he could not escape 'grape fever'. He topped it all off by studying oenology in the Agricultural University of Tirana and, after finishing, returned to Kurdari to take over the family business. It has not always been an easy ride, but Flogert has made up his mind that self-employment is his future.

Among his produce, he highlights *Sheshi i Zi* (a dark variety) and *Tajka* (red and



white), types of grapes indigenous to Albania. Next in line he mentions *Tokaj*, a white variety whose wine used to be exclusive to Austro-Hungarian princes. In his cellar one can even find the indigenous *Ceruje* wine. As a connoisseur, the indigenous types seem to be his favourite. He mentions changes that have taken place during the time he has been involved in making wine: for example, ten years ago, the vineyard needed one or two treatments per year; now it needs a minimum of three.

Flogert knows the area well, and he loves spending time outdoors with his friends. If you notify him on time, he can show you around Kurdari, see the Ottoman graves and Illyrian tombs or arrange a visit to the *Balgajt Lakes*. In the near future, he is planning to open his home as a guesthouse.

Ask for Flogert's house at the central bar in Kurdari or give him a call so he can pick you up!

Shefki Haxha

Simple, honest, soft cheese

The Mondi Dairy, although not large, is known well in Klos. The great demand for dairy products in Albanian traditional cuisine leads to people often bypassing quality of the source materials and the processing; but not in Shefki's dairy.



Shefki lives above his little *baxho* (dairy) with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and delightful granddaughters. He has worked in dairy production for more than 30 years, starting with his first ever job as a state factory worker during the communist regime, a position he held for 20 years. Later on, he worked for a big dairy company in Tirana. Using his savings, he managed to become independent, starting his own business, which he named after his son. Now, the whole family works or helps in the shop, especially the little ones; they're always the first tasters.



The workshop receives up to 500 litres of milk daily from the cowherds and shepherds of Klos, mostly cow's milk, and a small amount of sheep's milk. With it, the family produces soft white cheese and soft *kaçkaval*. Shefki is also proud of the yogurt he produces with his own culture, never altering his original recipe. Nor does he mix anything in the milk. It's not a lot, but without doubt it's an honest product that is sold immediately to his established network of customers, mainly the bigger restaurants often used for weddings. With the construction of the new *Rruga e Arberit*, Shefki hopes to expand his network. You can go and try his famous cheese at any time: the family is always there and open to visitors.

Shefki Haxha's baxho is located by the main road between Suç and Klos. Ask for ish perimorja, now a tiny café. Across from it, an alley leads up to Shefki's neighbourhood and shop, about 200 m from the main road.

Avdyl Kaja

coffee every morning.

At the gate of this villa in Patin, one understands right away that this is no ordinary village home. The entrance is covered by a ceiling of tiny decorative roses. The big, wooden veranda on the first floor offers unbounded views over the hills of Patin, full of fruit trees and vineyards. On the porch couch you will find Avdyl and Mane enjoying their Turkish coffee every morning.



The couple are both teachers, Avdyl of mathematics and Mane of biochemistry. They recall the school having up to 400 students during communism, back when free migration was not allowed. Having retired from teaching, they finally have time to enjoy their passion: their orchards and vineyards.

Avdyl has been producing wine for years. At the moment, he cultivates three types of grapes. The largest part are Merlot, making up about 50 percent of his produce. Cabernet, which Avdyl calls the king of wines, takes it's time to ripen: it's usually ready in late October. The one variety he picks out is his white muscat, an old English strain with a very distinct aroma. The raki produced with it is so special, it's sold out before production among guesthouses in Puka (northern Albania). Of course the couple keep some for themselves and honoured guests. The orchards are full of pears, plums and apples, the last of which they use to produce their own apple cider vinegar. First in line in front of the vegetable garden, one special creation stands out: they have grafted an apple tree to hold seven types of apples and one single pear branch.

Taking a tour around their house, a family tree dating back to 1675 is painted on one of the walls. Avdyl explains that his predecessors moved from Kukes (northern Albania) to Patin because of a blood feud. Although they're not an operational guesthouse, Avdyl kindly welcomes everyone visiting to have lunch on the veranda and admire the view, which is reminiscent of the atmosphere of Tuscany.

The Kaja House is located not far from the entrance of Patin; if no map is at hand, you can always ask around.



Hasan Kuka

The sweetest family of Suç

Between Suç and Kurdari, rolling hills covered in vineyards and fruit trees are the living proof of the region's long history in agriculture and fresh, local produce, renowned in all of Albania. One of the hilltops has been transformed into a labyrinth-like neighbourhood, with houses, sheds, haystacks, wells, one relic Opel '96 and endless orchards and vineyards covering the slopes. The Kuka family has turned this place into their own citadel, a more than self-sufficient structure. For their dedicated work (each member has their own occupation and specialty), they're practically considered royalty. But the most known, their king and inspiration, is without a doubt the beekeeping grandpa, Hasan Kuka.

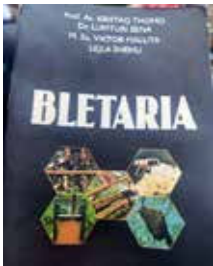


While the family curates the vineyards and orchards, grandpa Cani (as everyone calls him) can be found by the beehives. Hasan was born in 1935, during the Albanian Monarchy of King Zog's reign, four years before the outbreak of the second world war. His work has clearly kept him young, his passion for the bees seems to have become only stronger with the years, and his will power seems to be infectious; all three generations currently living together are farmers.

It all started in 1948, when his father started keeping bees for the first time. Back then it worked in primitive ways: the bees were kept in an empty oak stump and when it was time to collect the honey, they were suffocated by smoke. In 1956, Hasan could finally install more advanced technology, and ever since he has never harmed another bee. Between 1979 and 1993, Hasan's occupation under the communist regime was—you guessed it—beekeeping. Back then he looked



after more than 150 beehives. It was the time when he could easily produce up to 60 kg yearly from a single hive. He continued in the same profession after the fall of communism and instalment of democracy too. Between 1997 and 2020 he was even the head of the Beekeepers Association of Albania, officially retiring only at the age of 85! Privately, he still has 30–40 beehives left, essentially not needing a helping hand with them, but the kids are always happy to assist and learn.



A visit to Hasan's house will leave you baffled, especially when he takes out his books and records. His phenological calendar, all in handwriting, with detailed notes and remarks for every single day of each year, reaches back to 1980. Hasan explains that climate change shows a lot among the bee population, with the bees producing less each year and their diseases becoming more aggressive and untreatable. Modified and pesticide sprayed crops influence the bees' well-being too, as well as advancing technology such as Wi-Fi waves and soon, 5G.

With the smoker in hand, he explains that escaping smoke is a primitive response of the bees. Centuries ago, the wild bees lived in forests, and smoke meant fire. The intelligent creatures swarm around Hasan, who only wears the hat of his beekeeper suit; he doesn't mind the stings anymore. If you visit, you will for sure get a taste of the honey on a big chunk of honeycomb. As a bonus, their garden is full of rabbits, big and small. One of the uncles that lives next door breeds mini-Spitz and Pomeranian puppies. It's a joy to see them running around freely and being so well mannered at the same time, obeying every order.

You can find the Kuka family in their "citadel" in one of the highest neighbourhoods of Suç. Ask for Can Kuka, as everyone calls him in his home village.



