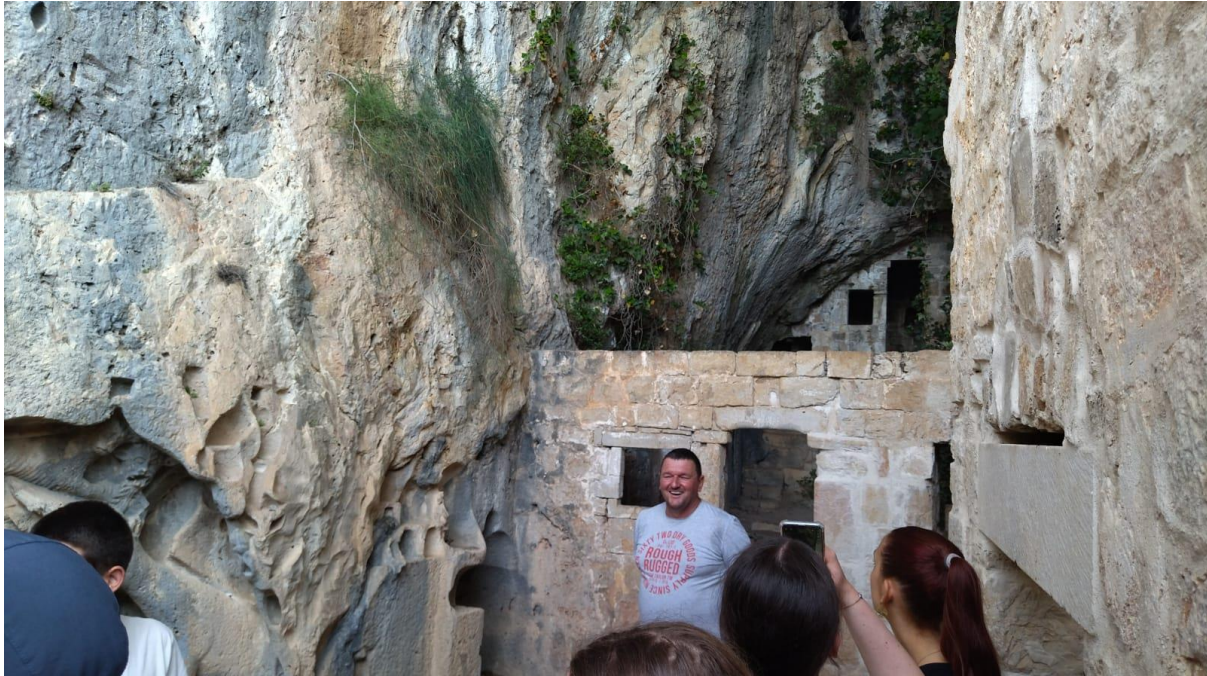




Interview with Mr Zoran Kojdić



Zoran Kojdić was born on April 3rd 1969 in Split. He had lived in Murvica until he started primary school. He attended Technical high school in Split. He dropped out of electrical engineering in the 1990s because of the war at the time. After that he lived in Germany for 7 years. He returned to Croatia and Murvica in September 2000 and he was the only person younger than 70 in Murvica. He founded a construction company which is still active today. About at that time he got interested in the Dragon's cave. He made his first tour to the Cave in May 2001 and he has been doing so for 21 years now. In 2016 he received an important award by the Croatian tourist board. Today he is a husband, a father of 2 and owns a dog.



You have been guiding people to the Dragon's cave for 21 years now, which clearly shows you enjoy living on the island of Brač. Can you tell us what made you come back to Croatia in 2000 after so many years of living abroad?

Well, it wasn't an accident I went to live in Germany, the idea was to stay with some friends for a few months but then it became 7 years and I had some nice time there, I enjoyed living there in Cologne, it was very nice for a young guy, I was 23 years old and I came back to Croatia when I was 30. When you are 30 you have to start thinking about your life in a different way than when being 20. So I got 2 options, to stay in Germany my whole life or to start some new story. I think at the age of 30 you can still make it, but I doubt you can when you are 40.

I was always connected to Murvica and Brač, I mean my family lived in Split, and I went to school in Split and when I told my parents I would live in Murvica, they were very surprised, shocked because at that time Murvica didn't have an asphalt road, water supply, I was the only person younger than 70, they really thought I was getting crazy in Germany. I registered my company and during winter I do construction works.

What made you start doing Dragon's Cave tours and what gets you motivated to keep doing them?

I was always looking for some occupation for summer because this construction job stops during summertime, and I am not such a person who can just lie on the beach for 3 months and that is how I started doing Dragon's Cave tours. As I started doing it I didn't know anything about it. I was very lucky because the year before, professor Batelja (one of the theologians from his story) published his book about the Cave and year after it Professor Kambi wrote his book as an answer to Batelja's book.

I didn't know I had a gift for storytelling, because I never did something similar and I never imagined myself being a tourist guide. The first idea was just to have some kind of a summer occupation. For the first 2,3 years it wasn't a big business, a lot of tours were just with 1 or 2 people. But I really didn't care, for me it was just fun. I am still doing it for fun, but more and more people are coming, they are more interested in it and I have a feeling I am doing something nice. During this time I have even had some journalists and TVs doing reportations about me and I am very proud of it. Finally, I am doing something I like and I think that is the best feeling you can get. I think this is the perfect job for me.

What has changed over those 21 years, how has tourism changed, for better or worse?



It's a difficult question, concerning the Dragon's cave I am getting more people than before, 1000-1500 people a year, I think that is a perfect number because if there would be more it would be overcrowded and it would destroy the place. We could build the road to this place and easily have 200-300 people daily but that would destroy the charm and this way people can experience what it was like for the hermits back in the day.

Generally, tourism has changed in a way that we get more young people, that only stay for a day or 2, go to the beach, spend a night at the bar, then go to the other island. I can understand it but it doesn't give them the opportunity to explore the island better, because I think to learn more about Brač you have to be here for at least a week. Young people mostly don't have time for this. I don't think it is good or bad, I just think it's a pity for them.

Do you think the tourism right now on this island is sustainable and why?

I think we are doing some things wrong, in high season everything is going too fast. The main touristic product is to buy Coca Cola for 5 kunas and sell it for 15. This is not very smart. We can offer much more to our tourists.

Going to Bol to a restaurant in high season is like going to a restaurant anywhere in the world, in Spain, or Greece, or Italy...

For the really original Croatian food, you have to look further from the main road.

If you had enough power, what is the first thing you would change considering the tourism in your hometown?

I think that we missed a big opportunity in the 1990s, we could have made things like we wanted, but then we missed it and what we missed on Brač is a big promenade around the whole island. Because there are a lot of places which cannot be reached on foot, only by a boat, why wouldn't we let tourists visit them by bike or on foot. But it would be really hard because we have a lot of rich people who don't want to sell their land.

I think this promenade would change our tourism a lot. We would have a lot more people coming in pre and post season because it is too hot to hike or cycle in high season and we don't need any more people in July or August, we are already overcrowded in that time of the year.

Also, that would make people stay longer than just a day or two, which would make them spend more money.





What have been the biggest issues you have faced during your career as a guide?

I had a situation where four old ladies broke their legs when they were going down. It is always a challenge to bring them down but I have contacts with HGSS and with the fire brigade in Bol so they always give me a hand. All of those ladies were older than 70 and had osteoporosis; they never fall hard but their bones are simply weak.

How much of an issue has covid been for your tours? Are there more tourists now than before covid?

During 2020 and 2021, I missed preseason, so April, May, but then in the high season, numbers were actually pretty good, better than the years before. I had a lot more domestic people and I think that is because all those Croatians that like spending time abroad, were locked in Croatia so they went on and explored it more. In the second half of August 2020 everything stopped again. 2021 was a bit better, so all in all for my tour it wasn't that terrible, probably because my tours take place in nature and not in closed areas.

During the pandemic did you have time to explore and find any other possible tourist attractions that you would like to revive and bring closer to the tourists?

Last few years I have worked a lot with Jadranka Nejašmić, the librarian from Bol, on her project "Terra Croatica: Broško blogo". We tried to recreate the historical Brač scenes, for example, life in Roman times, hermits in Cave... Even I discovered some places on the island that I didn't know about. Last year, near town Dračevica we found a pool, carved in a rock, 30x20 meters, and it was from Roman times. You can find more about it on Facebook page "Hrvatska Čitaonica Bol".

Bonus: Can you tell us any funny or interesting story you have come across in 21 years of your career as a tourist guide?

One funny story happened 2 weeks ago when Iva fainted because my story about the dragon was so boring.

Another story is about my first tour. Two Portuguese tourists called the tourist board and asked them what else they could visit and the Board told them about me and the Cave. We agreed to meet at 8 am. I was really nervous. They were a bit late, because they spent a whole night at the bar and a bit after 8 they came to me fully drunk. We went to the cave and they were soaking wet, alcohol was evaporating from them but they were listening to me the whole time. By the time we reached the



cave they were sober and everything turned out well. At the end I was very proud because they said “ Wow, this is not the history of Bol or Croatia, this is the history of the world”.

Another interesting story is about an elderly person who left Croatia and went to Chile. He returned rich and when he was very old, he wanted to visit the Dragon’s cave because it was the last place on the island of Brač he didn’t visit. He was 86 at the time and it took us 6 and half hours to get up there. After the tour I was getting cards from that guy every Christmas. I was getting it for 5 years and after that they stopped. I thought he died because he would be 91 at that time, however a few years ago, someone told me he was still alive, and he is almost 100 years old now!
