



Company Name

Mountain refuge Melissourgoi

Date of Interview

09/06/2021

Contact Person

Fotis Delimitros

Site

https://www.facebook.com/Katafigiomelissourgwn/photos/?ref=page_internal




Location: village of Melissourgoi, in the Regional Unit of Arta, Epirus

Melissourgoi village rests at the altitude of 870m at the range of Tzoumerka. The refuge is located 5km outside the village, at 1,023m, on the mountain.




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 Hi Fotis. Can you please tell me what triggered you in this business and describe what you do?

Hi Stella, thank you.

First of all, I never liked living in the city. I always liked nature, hiking and the loneliness of wild nature. I wasn't feeling good living in the city. I came here, in Tzoumerka, for rafting at Arachthos river. At that time, I had met a friend and we came here together. We found about this building which was abandoned back then. I was thinking of ways to get out of the city then so, together with my friend we decided to take this building, remake it (it was a relic) and ran the refuge. All these, back in 2012-2013.

 So, you weren't related to the place here. You just liked it and decided to stay. Yes?

Oh, yes, the place! When I arrived here I felt it like home. I loved it. I said this is the place I want to live in.

 Ok, now tell me about the refuge. How did it start? Did you get any funding?

The building belongs to the Municipality of Central Tzoumerka. It was abandoned and in a very bad condition. We didn't receive any funding from no one. The only money we ever got was two years ago when we restored the roof tiles. All the money was ours and of course from the income we get from the refuge.

 Can you describe me the refuge? And how it functions?

The refuge is 50sq.m. There are 5 rooms for guests. 3 5bed rooms and 2 10bed rooms. Each with its own bathroom. Also, a living room and a kitchen. And, one room where me and my partner stay. It's like a hostel. Usually people come here as groups. At the beginning we had guests during holidays (Christmas, Easter, some weekends, etc). Now, we have guests many more times throughout the year. People now us, we have created a stable group of people who come and come again. We are like a big group of friends now. People who come usually know us. Or have heard about us from friends. We have always people here from April to September. And, during weekends all other months.



How do you promote your business?

I use facebook mainly. There was a funding programme into which I applied (I still wait the results) in order to open an e-shop, as well. If I get it I will have both shops running. I also have some contacts with some people in youtube who promote my shop and also some advertising through relevant webpages with key-words. If someone is looking for a technician in Metsovo my shop appears first.



How many people work there?

Mostly me. But during summer we are about 4-5 people during the last 2 years.



Did you have any prior experience on this? Any relative skills?

Well, I was good at public relations, connecting with people, and at cooking. Both are useful here!



Any regrets for starting the business?

No! I would have done it all over again if I had to!



Is there any kind of seminars that you would like to attend?

Well, I don't know. Maybe learn some English. But, I have some friends who help me at this.



Something related to marketing may be?

No, I don't think so. This is something you can ask a professional to do for you.



ok. Are there any activities you organize there?

oh yes, many, all the time. We organize mushroom related activities in autumn. We invite people who know a subject to give some lectures and then organize a hiking in order to see i.e. plants, trees, etc. in nature. Sometimes we have a guest, I learn that he knows something so I ask him to make some presentations. The next day, just like that. We organize weekends with music activities. We also organize photograph seminars at a regular base.



Do you have any non-Greek guests?

Yes, but not many. We had some from USA, Afghanistan once or other places, but mainly our guests are from Greece.

 When you started this what was the reaction of local people? Did you have any problems?

Well, when we arrived people welcomed me. Back then, tourism wasn't developed much here. Ok, I don't have the best relations with all but also, the locals aren't obligated to like anyone who comes to their place. So, overall, some like us some not. Through time, I think they know us better and they have liked us more.

 I understand. Now tell me, would you consider to apply for some funding?

I would like it in order to cover many needs. However, there are many restrictions regarding the funding programmes. There are programmes that you are obligated to follow certain rules. I would like to take some funding and be able to do whatever I want. For example, I applied for a funding and they declined it because I had to provide a job position for one person. Which I can't, of course.

 How did covid affect you?

It didn't really. People were always calling to come here. When lockdown was over the phone was ringing all the time. Now, we are full booked till Christmas.

 Do you think you inspire younger people in your village or the surrounding area?

Yes, may be. Mostly we discuss many things we can do around here with young people who have studied and traveled and they are more open minded. Some have plans to start a business here. I believe that in the future some people will return and new things will develop. For example, four-five young people returned after their studies and now they ran some kind of business here the last year. I am optimistic for the next years.

 That's promising! How is your living there up in the mountain all year round?

It was very difficult the first 3 years. We were sleeping at 6 C! Many many difficulties in all aspects. Economic as well. I still owe money...but also we had some very nice moments. After that time, things got much better. Everything is more easy now. I had a steady income. Things began to roll. In general, I enjoy it here very much. I meet people. We have a very good time. We talk, play music, sit near the fire...spring and autumn here are great. I really like it!

 So you don't regret it?

oh no. I would do this all over again if I went back in time. And I consider this a success.



Your future plans?



You want the realistic ones or the other?

At the moment I try to create a basis so that other people could come here and work around here. My big dreams are, for us, to become a small vivid community in the next years. There are things that can be done in the village. Husbandry for example. Modern, not like our grandparents were working. Production of biofuel. Cheese making. A small winery, maybe. I would like more young people to come and work in primary sector. To combine new technologies with local resources. To produce local products. To bring new ideas. Altogether, we could really create something very nice here.

I really hope this will come true. Fotis, thank you very much! It was really nice talking to you.



Thank you too!