



Interview

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Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia

Q. In the last few years Croatia managed to attract an ever growing number of tourists, both on the European and the global tourism scene. In that context, where do you see Croatian tourism in the next few years, that is, what are the main activities you feel Croatia should undertake to maintain its position and ensure its success in being a high-quality tourist destination?

A. As far as tourism is concerned, Croatia is a country of great potential. Besides the Sun and the sea, our advantages are a well developed transit infrastructure and close proximity to the European emitive market. Therefore, our goal is to position Croatia as a destination that is interesting even outside the summer months and long weekends. To that end, we will work on strengthening selective tourism forms, attracting, for example, biking, golfing or gourmet tourists in an effort to satisfy various tourist profiles and attract them to Croatia outside the main summer season.

In order to further strengthen the competitiveness of Croatian tourism, we have set the following priority goals for ourselves in the next four years: lowering tourism VAT, drafting the Croatian Tourism Development Strategy, stimulating investments, privatizing state-owned tourism companies, changing laws and regulations, particularly the Tourist Land Act, reforming tourism associations and improving the related education system. We managed to realize the first and one of the most important goals by lowering tourism services VAT to 10% (to be enacted from 1 January 2012). I am very happy with that, since, among other things, it signals that the government is working on constructing a different (better) relationship with tourism, which it regards as one of the (main) strategic activities in Croatian economy.

In order to succeed in implementing all the planned measures, we must define the long-term visions and goals in tourism, which is why the speedy enactment of the Croatian Tourism Development Strategy, document that

will define further guidelines of the development of Croatian tourism, is needed. Recently, five final reports to be contained in the Strategy were presented to the public. This will allow for systematic approach and clearly defined guidelines for tourism management and drawing on EU funds after Croatia becomes a full-fledged member of the European Union.

Q. The Ministry of Tourism, in cooperation with the Association of Croatian Travel Agencies, is performing activities connected with the development of new products in tourism. How do you rate the scope and content of activities performed so far, and what do you think about the ability and possibility of domestic tourist agencies having an effect on shaping and on the content of local, regional and national tourism products?

A. For the last two years, the Ministry of Tourism, along with the Association of Croatian Travel Agencies, was involved with the project “Discover Croatia”, centred around the development of touristically undeveloped areas. In addition to the prolonged tourist season, the main goals of the project are strengthening cooperation between tourist agencies based on principles of destination management, development of our offer through focused forms of tourism, better use of existing resorts and capacities in touristically

undeveloped areas, as well as inclusion of the maximum number of service providers in tourism programmes. The success of the project can be seen in increased interest for the project and in increased number of new programmes. In 2010, 33 agencies with the total of 266 tourism programmes were given funds for the development of these programmes. In 2011 that number was 63 agencies with 721 programmes. This means that in the past two years almost a thousand new tourism products were made, specifically tied to theme-based tourism: bird watching, archaeology, geology, botany, active recreation, creative R&R, gastronomy, enology, architecture and life & work tradition. Through these programmes the Croatian tourist agencies constructed a whole new platform for presentation of tourism resources that Croatia has no shortage of. In addition, interest for developing new programmes is not subsiding.

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The importance of domestic tourist agencies is also observed in the fact that almost every other guest in Croatia hotels and apartments comes to Croatia via Croatian tourist agencies, as shown by the analysis made for the

Main Plan and Strategy of Development of Tourism in the Republic of Croatia. However, the potential of the Croatian tourist agencies and their creating new tourist programmes and acting as destination management companies has not been tapped nearly as much as it could be. This, too, is one of the key goals and activities placed before us in the Strategic Marketing Plan of Croatian Tourism 2010-2014, one which we still must work on.

Q. You are the president of the Croatian National Tourist Board, a quality-based Croatian tourism structure system. However, it seems this system is in a number of tourist destinations still not as linked as it could be with those in charge of tourism locally, particularly with tourist agencies. How do you rate the functioning of this system? Also, how involved should tourist boards be as direct support to all those in charge of creating the local tourist offer and how to achieve this relationship?

A. Increased professionalism and restructuring of the tourist board system is one of the priorities of the Ministry of Tourism. Roles of individual levels within that system should be more clearly defined. The local level should have the informative function, organize certain events and have information points for guests. It should also be the driver for new products and motives for arrival of tourists. Regional tourist boards should

transform into a DMO (destination marketing organization) and take care

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of some promotional functions, while the national tourist organization should handle national tourism marketing. I personally have a positive outlook on the tourist board system and feel that the boards played an important role in organizing and promoting Croatian tourism. They did a lot of work around setting-up locations, as informers, and in some regions they created new products, thereby redefining the tourist image of those regions. However, tourist boards must be even more active, and the private sector should also be included into the process. The key to success in this case is high-quality destination management; the tourist boards must include the private and the public sector, and must take responsibility for the success of tourism of each destination.

Q. The Ministry is preparing measures for stimulating visits to Croatia for the next season. Is

there any concrete news on that front, when do you plan to publish them, what would be the financial framework and what could these measures mean for foreign tour operators?

A. In accordance with the decision of the Tourism Council of the Croatian National Tourist Board, the proposal of the Operational Programme for 2013 is being prepared as we speak. It will define goals, tactics and tools for national promotion of Croatian tourism in the next year. This proposal should be completed during the summer of 2012.

I wish to emphasize that in the Operational Programme of the Croatian National Tourist Board for 2012 we introduced new content pertaining to

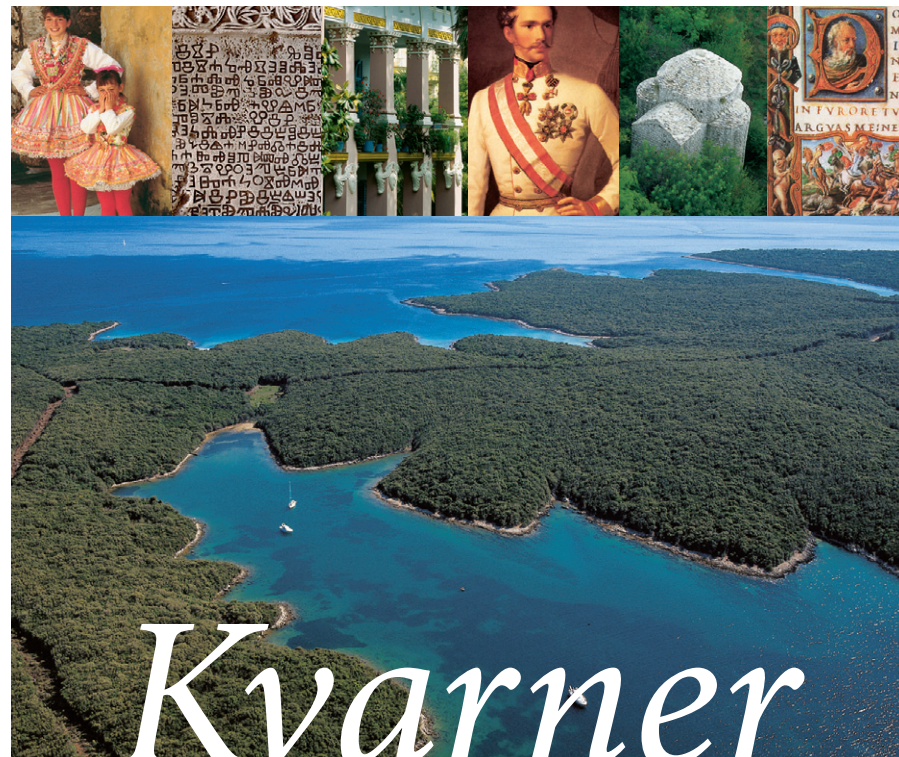
Operational Programme for 2013 contains two new goals: decrease of season-based accent, especially pertaining to the sea-bordering counties, and development and marketing of tourism in insufficiently developed areas.

participating in activities taking place only before and after the season, and increased the amount set aside for online activities.

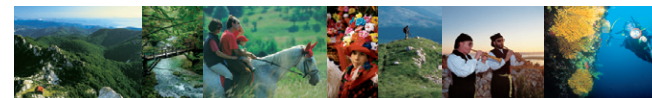
The Operational Programme for 2013 was started on time, so that both domestic and foreign interested parties from the public and private sectors (tourist boards, tour operators, tourist agencies, air companies) could timely plan their business activities for 2013, and so that the Programme can be a motivational tool in stimulating activities of those parties. The Operational Programme for 2013 contains two new goals: decrease of season-based accent, especially pertaining to the sea-bordering counties, and development and marketing of tourism in insufficiently developed areas. From the Operational Programme for 2013 we expect a shift in quality compared to the programmes issued so far, and from the tourist board community and professional associations we requested suggestions of possible improvements and amendments, in accordance with specifics of tourism products of each region or market segment.

Q. How would you rate the first tourism results from this year, and what do you expect, that is, which results would you be happy with at the end of the tourist year 2012?

Although this year will be very trying, I believe that the results of arrivals and overnight stays in 2012 will be at the levels of last year's results, while income from tourism could grow 3-5%, i.e. total EUR 7 billion.



Shores, Islands, Highland



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