

DARKO LORENCIN,
MINISTER OF TOURISM
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Goal: to be one of the top 20 travel destinations in the world



Why visit Croatia, and which of its destinations are a must-see, what has changed for tourism with Croatia's accession to the European Union, and in which way will Croatian tourism develop in the upcoming years - are just some of the questions we asked the head of Croatian tourism, Minister Darko Lorencin. Find the answers below...

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Photos: Archive of Ministry of
Tourism of the Republic of Croatia,
archive of the Ugljan Tourist
Board, fotolia, Željka Kunštek and
Robert Kunštek*

The first of July has passed, Croatia has joined the European Union. What exactly does that mean for Croatian tourism?

This year is both important and challenging for Croatia and Croatian tourism, and accession to the European

Union (EU) brings about many changes and advantages for Croatian tourism. We joined the EU in the middle of the main tourist season, under the watchful eye of the global community, and we tried to properly use that moment to represent ourselves. We tried to tell the world



Rovinj

■ Photos:
 Rovinj, city of romance
 (top); National Park Kornati
 is a popular destination for
 boaters (bottom)



Dugi otok and National Park Kornati

tip:
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 the city of romance, the Brijuni islands,
 Plitvice Lakes National Park, Dubrovnik,
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Croatia's best story, of the land of natural beauty, kind hosts, and rich content. I believe we achieved that. Since most foreign tourists come to Croatia from the European Union, Croatia has, as far as tourism is concerned, been a part of the "European family" for a long time. Still, the formal accession to the Union, the recognisability of Croatia and Croatian tourist products have become more visible on the market, and the flow of both people and capital will now be additionally simplified and strengthened, so a market of half a billion people will hold Croatia as a domestic and even more accessible vacation destination. Accession to the EU also is an additional motivator for investors, as they now have the resources of the Structural funds

available to them, which will reflect positively on the competitiveness of Croatian tourism. The accession of all new members to the EU represented a new incentive for the development of tourism to those countries, and I am certain that trend will continue in Croatia. Besides that, the physical barriers on the borders with Slovenia and Hungary were removed with our accession to the EU, so the flow of tourists arriving by car is much faster and simpler. On the other hand, with the accession, Croatia is completely adapting to the visa policies of the EU, according to which citizens of Russia, the Ukraine, Turkey, and other families outside the "European family" need a visa to enter Croatia as of April 1st, 2013.

Recently, the Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until 2020 was adopted. How will it be implemented, and what are its main goals?

Yes, this year we received the long-expected Strategy for the Development of Croatian Tourism, that is, the document that defines the future of



Mljet



Korčula



Plitvice Lakes Nacional Park

Photos: ■
 St. Mary island in the Great Lake, Mljet National Park (top); Korčula, city of Marco Polo (middle left); Plitvice Lakes National Park (middle right)

Except as a great summer destination, more and more we're trying to position Croatia as an ideal weekend destination.

tourism of our country and represents a signpost for a stronger development of tourism in all regions of Croatia over the next eight years. Besides that, the Strategy precisely defines guidelines for increasing the competitiveness of Croatian tourism in the international market, it gives clear instructions for motivating investments in the sector as well as being a foundation for retrieving resources from European Union funds. The main development goal is to be one of the top 20 most competitive travel destinations in the world. In order to achieve that goal of Croatian tourism by 2020, we must implement the following strategic goals: achieving new investments in the amount of 7 billion euro, improving the structure and quality of accommodations, i.e. the construction of 20 thousand new hotel rooms and increasing their share from

13.1 percent to 18.1 percent. There is also the construction of new facilities in camps, improving the quality of family accommodations, opening around 30 thousand new workplaces in tourism and associated businesses, and increasing tourist spending. All measures and activities included in the Strategy will be conducted in cooperation with the public, private, and civil sectors.

What are the most popular Croatian tourist destinations?

Choosing travel destinations greatly depends on the country the tourists hail from, the transportation devices they use to arrive, and the type of vacation they prefer. Guests who come to Croatia by car most often choose Istria, or north and central Dalmatia, i.e. the closer destinations. On the other hand, so-called air guests most often come to



Motovun



Dubrovnik

■ Photos:
Motovun, an ancient town situated in the interior of Istria (left); Stradun, the main street of Dubrovnik (right)

destinations connected with airports such as Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, Zagreb, and Pula. The favourite destinations for all tourists are our national parks, such as Plitvice lakes, Paklenica, Mljet and Kornati, but also islands, such as Vis, Hvar, Korčula, etc.

Why choose Croatia for a holiday?

Each part of Croatia is interesting and special in its own way, and not only during the summer, but throughout the entire year. Croatia is a land of diversity and truly offers many vacation options, and is widely renowned for the wealth of its natural and cultural heritage. Besides being an excellent summer destination, we are trying to position Croatia more and more as the ideal weekend-destination, especially for tourists from closer markets. We are dedicating special attention to the stronger development of tourist products,

such as cultural, bike, wine and food, golf, and health tourism...

Upon entry into the European Union, Croatia also got its first online magazine on tourism and travel, tipTravel.

The redirection to online tourism promotion was also emphasised in the mentioned Strategy, and the new Strategic Marketing Plan of Croatian Tourism for the 2014-2020 period will be based on that. In order to be able to strongly compete on the international tourism market, it is necessary to continually follow trends and to adapt to them in a timely fashion. Online is a trend today, and tourists are now found on the internet. So we will await them there first.

How do you spend your free time?

Travel is one of my favourite hobbies,

which I heartily enjoy, and which truly relaxes me. However, my current function as the Minister of Tourism includes numerous obligations, especially during the tourist season, so that my love for travel will have to take a backseat for some time.

Which Croatian destinations would you recommend to our readers?

For readers who are, for example, travelling by car, I would recommend a visit to Hum, the smallest town in the world, Rovinj, the city of romance, the Brijuni islands, Plitvice Lakes National Park, Dubrovnik, Kopački rit and Lonjsko polje, but also the entire interior of Istria and Dalmatia. For those who prefer the sea and sailing, I would definitely recommend Kornati National Park, and the islands of Mljet, Vis, Hvar, and Lastovo. ❖