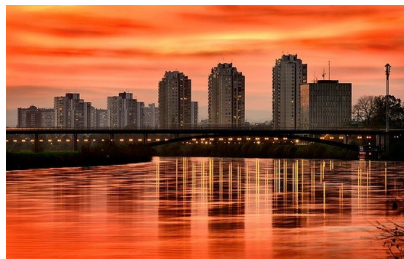


CROATIA SEEKS SOLUTION TO DECLINE IN TOURIST NUMBERS



Croatia is expecting downturn of its tourism industry. To limit the losses they welcome their former enemies, Serbs, who spend holiday in the country.

Tourism industry is an important source of revenue for Croatia. Visitors travel in here mainly because of its coastline and well-preserved coastal Renaissance towns. The global economic crisis, however, is going to hit the Croatian tourism industry hard in 2009.

Hoteliers and tourism agencies have already recorded a drop in demand. Local travel agencies expect a **10 to 15 per cent decline** in the turnover this year. It is problematic to make a more precise forecast for the industry because Croatia is every year more and more dependent on lower-price last minute reservations and on individual visitors. The behavior of these customers is hard to predict.

Foreign partners of Croatia's tourism sector demand a sharp price decrease. This measure has already been taken by some Croatia's competitors. Naturally, the tourism sector representatives do not like such trend. Franko Palma from the **Croatian Association of Hoteliers and Restaurateurs** even claims it would be catastrophic. He would prefer to offer better services for the same price.

Croatia currently counts on rich **tourists from Italy, Austria and Germany** to come to the country instead of visiting popular yet expensive exotic destinations. Surprisingly, Croats also try to attract tourists from **Serbia**. The two countries have a common history, the 1991-1995 war. More than 10,000 Croats and Serbs died and many fled their homes at that time which naturally influenced the relationship of the two countries.

Croatia was a popular holiday destination for Serbs in times when Croatia was a part of Yugoslavia. These days Serbs are welcomed again. Some 90,000 tourists from Serbia went to Croatia last year. The reasons are obvious; it is close and cheap destination to get to by car from Serbia. There are beaches and coastal resorts and also the two languages are very similar so there are no communication barriers. Will economic problems help to heal old wounds?

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