

CROATIA'S EMPTY BEACHES: PRICE HIKES ARE UNDERMINING TOURISM



Croatia had long been a showcase example of how a country could ruin its tourism industry by leaving profits to chance. And it was the best example of a country rushing to join the euro, which led to the ruin – this summer of 2026, the first symptoms of this process appeared in the sunbathed Croatia and its empty beaches.

Tourists familiar with the Adriatic coast between Zadar and Split or the islands near these cities could not fail to notice the changes – almost empty beaches, few tourists on the road leading through the peninsula, and only a Saturday-type traffic jam on the motorway. Even in August, the heart of the tourist season, there is no need to hurry when walking around the old town of Šibenik or Zadar in the evenings.

The weather is not evil, but it is not so good either: The sea is warm and clear – early August, the Adriatic Sea has reached a balmy temperature of 28 degrees, but it is not hot, and the sky is clear, which is also not characteristic of this time of year. **The problem starts when a tourist wants to try local cuisine or grab an ice cream.**

While in the shadow of the large hotels in Zadar's old town, a decent scoop of gelato costs at least three euros, but in the side streets, it costs two. An Aperol Spritz costs nine to eleven euros depending on where exactly in Zadar you are. Grilled squid, a delicacy in the Dalmatian region, costs about 25 euros in a simple konoba, while last year it cost about 20. In a beach hut near the camp near Šibenik, pancakes used to cost the equivalent of one euro before the changeover, and after it, two, and this year five of them. The children were disappointed.

Statistical office data show that prices in the tourism sector have risen by an average of 70% since 2015. Official inflation rates in Croatia are 4.4%, and they are slightly higher in coastal areas. The Ministry of Tourism reported a slight increase in the number of overnight stays of tourists in July compared to the same period last year. On the one hand, it really seems like a Potemkin village, because almost nobody would believe that prices in Zadar reflect an authentic picture. It's the opposite – an average of 70% over ten years seems like a Potemkin village statistic.

Croatia's tourism officials are eager to transition to more upscale, sustainable tourism, arguing that it is a better model for the future. In many ways, they are right about Croatia – it wants to become more like Mallorca. As for prices, it is moving in this direction faster than most want. **Regarding quality, it is much further away from this than it seems.** There are almost fifty years of habits of the peoples of socialist Yugoslavia, which cannot be forgotten and which cannot be canceled out by higher prices.

Croatia's natural beauty is indeed unique, but it seems that for the most part, it is being given away in exchange for full pension funds. On the one hand, empty beaches are a blessing for locals, but on the other hand, it is a symptom of crisis, which is also bad.

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