

**Romana Vlašić, direktorica  
Kongresnog ureda Dubrovnika**

*Živjeti i raditi u Dubrovniku i za njegov turizam te veći dio tridesetak godina dugog profesionalnog angažmana vezati uz MICE, dva su izazova koja Romanu Vlašić, direktoricu Turističke zajednice grada Dubrovnika, čine zanimljivim sugovornikom o razvoju i trendovima u kongresnoj industriji. Od agencijskih i hotelskih početaka, rada za inozemne i strane agencije i turoperatore, MICE prodajnog menadžera, voditelja insentiv odjela, voditelja Kongresnog ureda grada Dubrovnika pa sve do današnjeg mjesta direktorice TZ grada Dubrovnika i Kongresnog ureda – dug je niz poslova koji je usko vezan s razvojem kongresne industrije. Naša sugovornica članica je profesionalne asocijacije SITE, aktivno sudjeluje u radu Meeting steering group pri ECM udruženju te u profesionalnom udruženju za kongresnu industriju ICCA.*



# Hrvatska sve poželjnije MICE odredište

Razgovarala: Silvana Jakuš

# Croatia Is an Increasingly Popular MICE Destination



**Romana Vlašić,**  
Director of  
Dubrovnik  
Convention  
Bureau

*There are two challenges that make Romana Vlašić, Director of Dubrovnik Convention Bureau, an interesting interlocutor on the topic of development and trends in the convention industry: the fact that she has lived and worked in Dubrovnik in the field of tourism and that she has linked most of her thirty-year long professional engagement to MICE. From the beginning of her career in agencies and hotels, working for foreign agencies and tour operators, becoming a MICE sales manager, head of the department for incentives, head of Dubrovnik Convention Bureau to the current position of the Director of the Dubrovnik Tourist Board and Convention Bureau – the string of her jobs which are closely related to the development of the convention industry is long.*

*Our interlocutor is a member of the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), actively takes part in the work of the “Meeting steering group” within the association European Cities Marketing (ECM) and of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA).*

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Interviewed by: **Silvana Jakuš**



Daljnji razvoj kongresne industrije u Hrvatskoj zasigurno ima dobre temelje u ukupnom pozitivnom imidžu destinacije, razvijenoj kongresnoj infrastrukturi i organiziranoj ponudi koju predvode Dubrovnik, Zagreb i Opatija.

Zahvaljujući širokom spektru poslovnih skupova i već odlično pozicioniranim našim kongresnim destinacijama na svjetskoj kongresnoj sceni, hrvatska kongresna ponuda ima realne mogućnosti daljnjeg organiziranog razvoja i napredovanja. Naravno, imajući na umu da raspoložemo visokokvalitetnim kongresnim kapacitetima, profesionalnim kadrovima, jedinstvenom kulturno-povijesnom baštinom, kao i općom prepoznatljivošću destinacije. No, kad je riječ o Dubrovniku, koji je uz Zagreb i Opatiju lider u MICE-u, suočavamo se s problemom izrazito sezonalne dostupnosti i ograničenošću kapaciteta u avioprijevozu, što ne ide u prilog većem širenju poslovanja u kongresnom segmentu. Objektivna pretpostavka kvalitetnog udjela kongresne industrije je svakako dostupnost, kao osnovni preduvjet za stvaranje zaokružene marketinške poruke. U tom smislu, a sukladno našem sloganu „Grad za sva godišnja doba“, TZ grada Dubrovnika je preuzela inicijativu i konačno nakon tri i pol godine uspjela vratiti cjelogodišnji izravni let za Frankfurt koji, uz zimski let iz Londona i Istanbula, ipak čini neophodan pomak u kreiranju ponude i promjeni percepcije o destinaciji.

**Stječe se dojam da su mišljenja o važnosti MICE-a donedavno bila polarizirana: s jedne strane imamo turističko gospodarstvo odnosno hotelijere koji u njega ulažu, a s druge strane odluke institucija koje su svojedobno čak ukinule postojeći nacio-**

Owing to a wide range of business meetings and our convention destinations which are already well positioned on the world convention scene, the Croatian convention offer has real opportunities for further organized development and advancement. We need to bear in mind that we dispose of high-quality convention capacities, professional staff, unique cultural and historical heritage, as well as generally recognizable destinations. But when it comes to Dubrovnik, which is the leaders in MICE next to Zagreb and Opatija, we are faced with the problem of extremely seasonal accessibility and capacity limitations of air travel, which does not favour large business expansion in the convention segment. An objective precondition for achieving a significant share of convention industry is certainly accessibility. It is a basic prerequisite for creating a well-rounded marketing message. In this regard, in accordance with our slogan Dubrovnik - a city for all seasons, the Dubrovnik Tourist Board has taken the initiative and after three and a half years finally managed to re-establish a year-round direct flight to Frankfurt. This flight, along with the winter flight from London and Istanbul, makes the necessary shift in generating offers and changing perceptions of the destination.

**It seems that there have been polarised opinions about the importance of MICE until recently: on the one hand, we have a**



**tourism - based economy or actually hoteliers investing in it, and on the other hand, decisions by institutions that have even closed the national Convention and Incentive Bureau which had a long tradition. Do you see any progress? Do you expect joint action?**

- Further development of the convention industry in Croatia certainly has good foundations in the overall positive image of the destination, developed convention infrastructure and organized offer led by Dubrovnik, Zagreb and Opatija. I would like to highlight high-quality staff, and the advantage of having a high level of security. However, we still face an important logistics shortcoming and this is limited accessibility, as evidenced by all researches and surveys. I would say that the priority is a better traffic link in the form of direct flights throughout the year for all the destinations we want to develop in the convention segment. This should certainly be one of the main strategic goals of Croatian tourism, given the focus on season prolongation. In that sense, cooperation of all stakeholders is necessary, from the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Transport, the Croatian National Tourist Board, local county and city authorities to local tourist boards and convention bureaus, which usually take the initiative. Another important factor is branding and better positioning of Croatia on the global market of the meeting industry, then quality communication of competitive

**nalni kongresni ured duge tradicije. Vidite li pomake? Očekujete li zajedničko djelovanje?**

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moderna kongresna centra, aktivna suradnja s lokalnim kongresnim uredima i sa strukovnim udrugama. Naglasak na visokoj kvaliteti usluge, kontinuirana edukacija i certificiranje zasigurno će biti pokretači značajnijeg razvoja kongresnog turizma u Hrvatskoj. Dodatno, u potencijalnim novim hrvatskim kongresnim odredištima koja se strateški opredijele za MICE potrebno je uspostaviti suradnju svih lokalnih dionika i definirati zajedničke ciljeve, osmisliti strategiju razvoja kongresnog turizma, kreirati sadržaje s odmakom od uobičajene ponude „sunce i more“ te osigurati tehničke preduvjete, educirati kadrove i kvalitetno tržištu predstaviti tu ponudu. Svakako je na Hrvatskoj turističkoj zajednici i budućem nacionalnom kongresnom uredu koordinacija ponude i zajedničkog nastupa.

Što se tiče aktualnog trenutka i važnosti MICE segmenta, posebno mi je drago da možemo objaviti pozitivne vijesti o pomacima u zajedničkom budućem djelovanju. Naime, Ministarstvo turizma i Hrvatska turistička zajednica su donijeli odluku o ponovnom osnivanju nacionalnog kongresnog ureda kao osnovnom prepoznatljivom nacionalnom partneru koji objedinjuje cjelokupnu kongresnu ponudu i koordinira zajedničke aktivnosti. Održano je nekoliko radnih sastanaka na teme „ambasador programa“, prioriteti aktivnosti, oglašavanje, specijalizirani sajmovi i prezentacije, aktivno sudjelovanje u radu s međunarodnim stručnim organizacijama, potreba ponovnog vođenja kongresne statistike u suradnji s DZS itd.

advantages, developing new technologies, and wide availability of Wi-Fi. Moreover, a re-opening of a national convention bureau is of great importance, as well as cooperation between the public and private sector. To start with, at least two modern convention centres should be built, and an active cooperation with the local convention bureaus and with professional associations should be established. Emphasis on high-quality service, continuing education and certification will certainly be the driver of more significant development of the convention tourism in Croatia. In potential new Croatian convention destinations that strategically opt for MICE, it is also necessary to establish cooperation with all local stakeholders and define common goals, devise a strategy for the development of the convention tourism, create content with a shift from the usual offer based on the sun and the sea, ensure technical prerequisites, educate the staff and present the offer to the market in a quality manner. Certainly, the coordination of the offer and the joint presentation are the tasks of the Croatian National Tourist Board and the future National Convention and Incentive Bureau.

As for the current moment and the importance of the MICE segment, I am especially pleased to announce positive news on the progress in the future joint work. The Ministry of Tourism and the Croatian National Tourist Board have adopted a decision to re-establish the National Convention and Incentive Bureau

as a basic distinctive national partner that brings together the entire convention offer and coordinates joint activities. Several working sessions were held on the following topics: program ambassadors, priority activities, advertising, specialized trade fairs and presentations, active participation in the work of international professional organizations, the need to restart the convention statistics in collaboration with CBS, etc. Over the past several years, the local Convention Bureaus of the Dubrovnik, Zagreb and Opatija Tourist Boards, in cooperation with the CNTB, have maintained the incidence of Croatian convention representatives on the global market. In the meantime an association of professionals in convention tourism has been established, which is also very active especially in the field of training. Judging by all this activity, I would conclude that better times are coming for the convention industry at the national level as well.

**All this talk about the need to build convention centres and introduce identity cards for this job is very old, but it seems it is still far from being realized. How do you explain this fact? Would not a public-private partnership and the use of EU funds help to make realization more probable?**

The question of convention centres is constantly discussed, almost as much as the prolonging of the season. Fortunately, there are initiatives and each destination is aware of the need to build a convention centre, or in our case - a multifunctional hall for conventions and concerts with a capacity of 2500 to 3000 seats, exhibition spaces as well as a sufficient number of smaller halls. A public-private partnerships and the use of EU funds would certainly make realization more probable. At this point it is good that certain activities have been launched to create the preconditions for building a convention centre, both in Dubrovnik, Zagreb and in other cities. Let me start with the examples in our area. The Strategy of Tourism of Dubrovnik-Neretva County points to the importance of building a convention centre. Accordingly, the county has taken initial action concern-



Proteklih nekoliko godina su lokalni kongresni uredi TZ Dubrovnika, Zagreba i Opatije, u suradnji s HTZ-om, ipak održali pojavnost hrvatskih kongresnih uzdanica na svjetskom tržištu, a u međuvremenu je osnovana udruga profesionalaca u kongresnom turizmu koja je također vrlo aktivna, posebno na području edukacije. Po svemu tome bih zaključila da za kongresnu industriju i na nacionalnoj razini dolazi bolje vrijeme.

**Priče o potrebi izgradnje kongresnih centara, osobne iskaznice opredijeljenosti za ovaj posao, jako su stare, ali, čini se, još uvijek daleko od realizacije. Kako to tumačite? Ne bi li javno-privatnim partnerstvom, korištenjem sredstava EU fondova, realizacija mogla postati realnijom?**

Pitanje kongresnog centra je vječna tema, gotovo kao i produljenje sezone... Na sreću, postoje inicijative i svaka je destinacija svjesna potrebe gradnje kongresnog centra, odnosno, u našem slučaju – multifunkcionalne kongresno-koncertne dvorane kapaciteta 2500 do 3000 mjesta, uz izložbene prostore, kao i dovoljnog broja manjih dvorana. Javno-privatno partnerstvo uz korištenje sredstava EU zasigurno bi realizaciju učinili realnijom. U ovom trenutku je dobro da su pokrenute određene aktivnosti oko stvaranja preduvjeta za gradnju kongresnog centra, kako u Dubrovniku tako i u Zagrebu i drugim gradovima. Da krenem od primjera iz naše sredine. U Strategiji turizma Dubrovačko-neretvanske

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Županije ukazuje se na važnost gradnje kongresnog centra, a u skladu s tim Županija je poduzela početne radnje oko odabira adekvatne lokacije te izrade projektne dokumentacije. Nakon toga će uslijediti definiranje modela partnerstva vezano za gradnju, ali i daljnje upravljanje. Nacionalni Akcijski plan kongresnog turizma je također prošao pripremnu fazu, a ističe potrebu gradnje kongresnih centara. No, to ne znači da kod nas, kao i u drugim destinacijama, kongresna ponuda nije razvijena. Unatoč tome što još nema kongresni centar, Dubrovnik raspolaže sa značajnim kongresnim kapacitetima u hotelima 5\* i 4\*, koji su svojim ulaganjima uspjeli podignuti i održati kongresnu ponudu na najvećoj razini te uspješno konkuriraju drugim renomiranim gradovima. Danas se u Dubrovniku uspješno organiziraju međunarodni kongresi do 1500 sudionika, a s obzirom na činjenicu da većinu svjetskih kongresa čine upravo oni srednji do 500 sudionika, Dubrovnik je idealan, provjereno visokokvalitetan izbor. Dubrovnik ove godine u lipnju ima čast biti domaćin 10. ISABS konferencije o forenzici i antropološkoj i medicinskoj genetici na kojoj će sudjelovati četvero dobitnika Nobelove nagrade u programu „Nobel Spirit“ koji se po prvi put održava i to upravo u Dubrovniku.

Kao dobar primjer poslovnih događanja u izvansezonskom razdoblju izdvojila bih predstavljanja automobilskih modela dvije godine uzastopno, Mercedes a i Nissana Micre, koji su ostvarili značajan turistički promet u do sada tradicionalno pustim zimskim mjesecima, što

ing the selection of an adequate location and design of project documentation. This will be followed by defining a model of partnership in relation to the construction itself but also further management. The national Action plan for the development of convention tourism has also passed the preparatory phase, and it certainly highlights the need to build convention centres. However, that does not mean that convention services are not developed in our city as well as in other destinations. Despite the fact that it doesn't have a convention centre yet, Dubrovnik has significant convention capacities in five-star and four-star hotels, which have managed to improve and maintain their convention services at the highest level and as such successfully compete with other reputable cities. Today international conventions of up to 1500 attendees are successfully organized in Dubrovnik. Given the fact that the majority of the world conventions are of medium size and have 500 attendees, Dubrovnik is an ideal, proven destination of high quality. In June this year Dubrovnik will have the honour to host the 10th ISABS Conference on Forensics and Anthropologic and Medical Genetics with the participation of four Nobel Prize winners as a part of the program called "Nobel Spirit", which is held right here in Dubrovnik and for the first time.

As a good example of off-season business events, I would like to mention car presentations of Mercedes and Nissan Micra for two consecutive years, which have realized significant tourism activity during usually solitary winter months. This led to employment of a large number of people in hotels, agencies, hospitality facilities, etc. Another form of selective tourism is film shooting which has become common in Dubrovnik during winter. It has direct and indirect positive effects, from hiring and employing people, facilities which are working, to the marketing effect of the film and the fact that it was recorded in Dubrovnik. Apart from the focus on the convention industry and organized promotion, a better visibility of a destination is primarily determined by its accessibility, in particular through available direct flights all year round. It is well known that business travellers typically do



not change planes wasting time at airports until they reach their final destinations for a simple reason: business trips are brief and specific. Furthermore, the price of reaching the destination is still an important element of the overall offer, then the willingness of the destination to participate in and understand this tourism segment. Nowadays the question of security is of paramount importance, and Croatia and Dubrovnik hold excellent positions as very safe destinations.

The reputation of Dubrovnik is a great challenge and responsibility for professionals in this field. We follow every change, look forward to mutual success, participate in and encourage development, but we also know how to spot possible disadvantages and find ways to remove them. Dubrovnik has gained well-deserved recognition. I would say that the awards go to all employees in tourism and those who are not directly involved in it, certainly to all of our fellow citizens, and to the city that lives with tourism.

**What are the global trends in MICE? What is expected? Does Croatia have an adequate response?**

Standards and business travels change in line with the general changes in traveling habits. With the arrival of new generations, the development of new technologies is at the top of professions. Availability of a high-speed Internet, usage of applications, social net-

je izravno utjecalo na zapošljavanje većeg broja ljudi u hotelima, agencijama, ugostiteljskim objektima itd. Kao još jedan oblik selektivnog turizma spomenula bih i filmska snimanja koja su u Dubrovniku postala uobičajena tijekom zime. Ovdje se radi o pozitivnim posrednim i neposrednim učincima, od angažiranja ljudi i zapošljavanja, otvorenih objekata... do marketinškog učinka filmskog ostvarenja i činjenice da je snimano u Dubrovniku.

Ako izuzmemo usmjerenost prema kongresnoj industriji i organiziranu promociju, bolju vidljivost destinacije u prvom redu određuje dostupnost, posebno izravnim letovima tijekom cijele godine. Poznato je da poslovni putnici u pravilu ne presjedaју gubeći vrijeme po aerodromima do krajnje destinacije iz jednostavnog razloga što su poslovna putovanja kratka i konkretna. Nadalje, cijena dolaska u destinaciju je i dalje bitan element ukupne ponude, zatim i spremnost destinacije za sudjelovanjem i razumijevanjem ovog segmenta turizma. U današnje vrijeme pitanje sigurnosti je od izuzetne važnosti, a Hrvatska i Dubrovnik drže odlične pozicije kao vrlo sigurne destinacije. Reputacija Dubrovnika veliki je izazov i odgovornost za nas u struci. Pratimo svaku promjenu, veselimo se zajedničkom uspjehu, sudjelujemo i potičemo razvoj, ali i znamo uočiti moguće nedostatke i naći načina da ih ispravimo. Brojna zaslužena priznanja su upućena Dubrovniku, rekla bih svim djelatnicima u turizmu i onima koji to nisu izravno, svakako i svim našim sugrađanima u gradu koji živi turizam.

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Incentiv putovanja su kreativni izazov, a za njihove organizatore Hrvatska je otkriće kao nova destinacija. U 2017. očekujemo blagi porast poslovnih skupova, kao i povećanje potrošnje.

**Kakvi su globalni trendovi u MICE-u? Što se očekuje? Ima li Hrvatska adekvatan odgovor?**

U skladu s općim promjenama u navikama putovanja, mijenjaju se standardi i poslovnih putovanja. Dolaskom novih generacija razvoj novih tehnologija je pri vrhu zanimanja, dostupnost brzog interneta, upotreba aplikacija, društvenih mreža, live streaminga do virtualnih sastanaka... postali su obavezan element današnjih poslovnih skupova. Međutim, face to face meetings su i dalje osnova meeting industrije, iako se, zbog užurbanosti življenja, još više ističe potreba brze i jednostavne dostupnosti. Jedan od naglašenih trendova je i organizirati kvalitetan skup s ograničenim budžetom, odnosno odgovorno ponašanje s novcem. Dodatno, oznaka ekološke osjetljivosti ili green meetings je poželjna prilikom promišljanja o destinaciji. Kada je o odabiru destinacije riječ, najčešće se biraju veliki poznati gradovi, pa su, što se tiče Europe, na vrhu ljestvice uobičajeno Beč, Pariz, Berlin, Madrid, Barcelona itd. Unatoč tome, Hrvatska je prepoznata kongresna destinacija, prvenstveno zahvaljujući pozicijama koje su postigli Zagreb i Dubrovnik.

Organizacija skupova asocijacija ima svoja pravila pa se određene rotacije mogu predvidjeti i organizirano lobirati. Incentiv putovanja su kreativni izazov, a za njihove organizatore Hrvatska je otkriće kao nova destinacija. U 2017. očekujemo blagi porast poslovnih skupova, kao i povećanje potrošnje. Važne odrednice su vrijednost za novac, dostupnost, nove tehnologije, povrat investicije (ROI), sigurnost,

works, live streaming to virtual meetings have all become a compulsory element of today's business meetings. However, "face-to-face" meetings are still the basis of the meeting industry, even though, because of the bustle of life, the need of quick and easy access is emphasized even more. One pronounced trend is to organize a high quality meeting with a limited budget, that is, responsible money management. Furthermore, a badge of ecological awareness or green meetings badge is deemed desirable while taking a destination into consideration. When it comes to the very selection of the destination, large famous cities are chosen most often, so as far as Europe is concerned, usually Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Barcelona etc. top the list. Nevertheless, Croatia has been recognized as a convention destination, primarily due to positions achieved by Zagreb and Dubrovnik. Organizing meetings of associations has its own rules, so certain rotations can be foreseen and lobbied for in an organized way. Incentive trips are a creative challenge. Croatia is seen as a new discovery, a new destination by their organizers. In 2017 we expect a slight increase in the number of business meetings, as well as an increase in consumption. Important determinants are value for money, accessibility, new technologies, the return on investment (ROI), safety, environmental component of meetings, innovation and stimulating environment. Global tourism trends show a definite increase,



according to the analysis of the Travel Trends Report, which predicts growth of tourist activity of about 4%. Travelers from the US and Asia will top the list. Furthermore, it is estimated that the global GDP will increase by about 3.5%, suggesting increased consumption, both for private vacations and business trips. It is up to us to direct positive trends towards sustainable tourism by using careful consideration, to plan further development, while respecting guests, visitors, as well as fellow citizens, in order to provide them with the experience we have promised. Many think that incentives are an area for which we have the greatest predispositions.

**Are we developing, do we have a creative staff? Do we present this form of services to the market in a creative way?**

Incentives are a special high-budget form of business meetings which require only the best. Dubrovnik is high on the list due to the unique environment and a creative approach. Croatia as a whole is an ideal incentive destination, rich in its diversity, offering an authentic, unforgettable experience. In recent years in cooperation with the Tourist Board of Zagreb we presented the irresistible combination of incentive offers which include Zagreb and Dubrovnik for distant MICE markets of the United States, Brazil and India, creating a common product that has proven to be a winning combination which surely gives more to visitors. ||

ekološka komponenta skupova, inovativnost i poticajno okruženje.

Globalna turistička kretanja idu uzlaznom putanjom, prema analizi Travel Trends Reporta, predviđa se rast turističkog prometa za oko 4 posto, a predvodit će putnici iz SAD-a i Azije. Nadalje, procjenjuje se da će i globalni BDP rasti oko 3,5 posto, što ukazuje na povećanu potrošnju, kako za privatna odmorišna putovanja, tako i za poslovna. Na nama je da ozbiljnim promišljanjem usmjeravamo pozitivna kretanja ka održivom turizmu, planiramo daljnji razvoj uvažavajući goste, posjetitelje kao i sugrađane, kako bismo osigurali iskustvo koje smo obećali.

**Po mišljenju mnogih insentivi su područje djelovanja za koje imamo najveće predispozicije. Razvijamo li se, imamo li kreativne kadrove te predstavljamo li tržištu ovaj oblik ponude na kreativan način?**

Insentivi su poseban visokobudžetni oblik poslovnih skupova kad se traži najbolje od najboljeg i upravo je Dubrovnik visoko na ljestvici odabira s obzirom na jedinstveno okruženje i kreativan pristup. Hrvatska u cjelini idealna je insentiv destinacija, bogata u svojoj raznolikosti, nudi autentično nezaboravno iskustvo. Proteklih smo godina u suradnji s TZ Zagreba prezentirali tu neodoljivu kombinaciju insentiv ponude Zagreba i Dubrovnika za daleka MICE tržišta SAD-a, Brazila i Indije, stvorivši zajednički proizvod koji se pokazao kao dobitna kombinacija kojom posjetitelji zasigurno dobiju više. ||

Incentive trips are a creative challenge and Croatia is seen as a new discovery, a new destination by their organisers. In 2017 we expect a slight increase in the number of business meetings, as well as an increase in consumption.