



USAID: TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND
MARKETING PROJECT, CROATIA

POST FAMILIARIZATION TRIP REPORT

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ABOUT MOUNTAIN TRAVEL SOBEK

Mountain Travel Sobek, founded in 1969, is widely considered in the North American travel industry as the pioneers of active travel. Each year, Mountain Travel Sobek sends approximately 3500-4000 people to destinations spanning the globe, with approximately 20% of those going to Europe.

Mountain Travel began with the belief that there is a little bit of adventure in everyone. The early days were fueled by the simple passions of three outdoor enthusiasts and world travelers who loved exploring remote wilderness environments. The three—Leo Le Bon, Allen Steck, and Barry Bishop—officially founded the company in January 1969 with the hope of indulging their incurable wanderlust while doing business at the same time. This was the true start of "adventure travel" and the travel industry hasn't been the same since.

On a parallel track, Richard Bangs, Lew Greenwald, and John Yost founded Sobek in 1973 after leading an expedition on the Awash, a little-known African river filled with crocodiles. The trip, meant to be a last fling before the three recent college graduates entered the routing working world, instead inspired them to form a commercial international rafting company, naming it after the ancient Egyptian god of crocodiles.

In 1991 the two companies joined forces to become Mountain Travel Sobek, offering the broadest range of active adventure travel trips to far-flung corners of the planet ever provided by a single company.

AT MOUNTAIN TRAVEL SOBEK, WE ARE DRIVEN BY TWO PHILOSOPHIES.

One is the credo by which we have guided our company for over 30 years. Mountain Travel Sobek is a continuing experiment in discovery: of new lands, of exotic cultures, and of wondrous wildlife far from fences and highways. We believe the best way to bring to light the marvels of nature, the people of the world and ourselves, is by traveling in small groups—treading lightly with responsibility and sensitivity—while enjoying firsthand the boundless beauty and variety of our miracle planet.

The other is our philosophy for our clients - Plan nothing, enjoy everything. We, in cooperation with our in-country partners, take care of all of the logistics so that our clients can have more time to do what's most important: relax, enjoy the experience, and have fun!

HIKING—EXPLORING THE WORLD ON FOOT

Ever since Mountain Travel Sobek took its first footsteps into the remote kingdom of Nepal in 1969, our on-foot adventures have been among our most popular activities. We separate our on-foot adventures into two categories—hiking and trekking.

Hiking—which basically means, "taking a long walk" – is one of the best ways to truly get to know a region, to explore our world close up and absorb the sights and the sounds of the natural world. Hiking doesn't require a lot of gear; you can enjoy full days in the outdoors without having to "rough it" by carrying a lot of gear or staying in rustic campgrounds.

Today, we offer hiking trips all over the world. Europe continues to be our biggest hiking destination because of its well-developed infrastructure and easy accessibility to comfortable lodging in cities and villages.

A TYPICAL HIKING DAY

If the day's hike is a long one, we'll start early—if it's a shorter hike, we have time to stroll around for a while in the town or village where we stayed overnight before heading out on the trail. Lunch is enjoyed either on the trails, picnic-style, or we seek out a small local restaurant where nothing beats the colorful ambiance or the tasty cuisine. After lunch, there are more hiking or other activities, depending on the trip you have chosen. In the late afternoon, we check into our overnight accommodation, and have time to take a look around and freshen up before dinner.

Though hiking is the biggest activity on these trips, there is plenty of time in our itinerary to visit towns and villages, bazaars, and any places of cultural, historical, or architectural interest. You will be pleasantly surprised by the hospitality of the local folks you meet everywhere, and their genuine interest in sharing their knowledge (or at least a smile!).

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Our hiking trips range from short, easy walks to longer more strenuous day hikes. The latter requires that you have prior hiking experience and are capable of walking 5-7 hours a day on trails with steep ascents and descents. Please see Trip Ratings for more information on trip activity levels.

ACCOMMODATIONS & FOOD

The accommodations on our hiking trips vary with destinations. As you might expect, there are good hotels in the towns we encounter, but more rustic lodging higher in the mountains. And you should expect to share facilities, including showers, at some inns. All the accommodations we use, though, are comfortable and reflect the charm of the local culture, and there is nothing better than winding up a day of hiking with a hot shower and a great meal.

In addition to idyllic scenery and fascinating cultures, you will also enjoy delicious food and often fine wines on our hiking adventures. Most of our travelers are also adventurous when it comes to sampling local dishes, and this often becomes one of the highlights of the day! You will also discover that slowing down, taking your time, and savoring a meal is a custom very easy to get used to. Not to mention conversations with your fellow travelers often lasting long into the night.

ACTIVE UNIQUE ITINERARIES

Our adventures are planned with reasonably paced itineraries, incredible attention to detail, and the right mix of fun, learning, and challenge that ensure a memorable vacation. Clients will find our adventures physically active and culturally rewarding. Whether they ride a camel in Rajasthan or climb to the top of Kilimanjaro, they will experience firsthand the cultures and environments of the region they are visiting. And after a long day of adventuring, we ensure them a comfortable night's rest in excellent accommodations from regional inns to our own private camps.

SMALL GROUPS

Our clients come from all walks of life and are spirited travelers who share a passion for our wonderful world. They range in age from their late 20s to mid-80s, reminding us all that we can never be too young or too old to have fun.

Our groups are intentionally kept small—usually less than 15 people—to allow for a more intimate experience with the people and wildlife they encounter on their adventure. With such a small number of people, we can take advantage of many unexpected invitations and opportunities that would be impossible with larger groups.

Our guides often have very close ties to the local community and we are readily welcomed into the lives of the local folk. We may be invited to share lunch with a Turkish family or visit an artist's studio in Tuscany.

SAFETY

Our safety record is unparalleled. The guides are fully trained, our equipment is state-of-the-art, and we continually monitor conditions with our worldwide team of outfitters to make certain every trip is run safely and with the highest standards of quality.

TRIP DESTINATION CONSIDERATIONS MOUNTAIN TRAVEL SOBEK: EUROPE

The following outlines key considerations when selecting destinations for new trips with Mountain Travel Sobek. While these considerations are those of the Program Director for Europe at Mountain Travel Sobek, I believe they are also common consideration of several large North American active group tour outbound tour operators, and can be read as a list of general guidelines for active group tour readiness for the American active travel market.

This outline is a detailed selection of considerations to be applied to all of Croatia. What follows are 3 regional outlines specifically outlining key observations of Slavonia, Istria, and Dalmatia, and the noteworthy high-points, as well as recommendations for group tour readiness. Please consider this outline in combination with the 3 regional outlines.

- 1) Destination appeals to outbound active group tour clientele for reasons:
 - a) Unique destination
 - i) Destination has its own character and unique aesthetic which accurately reflects the history and culture of the destination
 - ii) Destination is not offered (or commonly offered) by our top North American competitors
 - iii) Destination offers something new for the well-traveled client
 - b) Enticing destination
 - i) Destination is abundant in natural, scenic beauty (i.e. snowcapped mountains, pristine wilderness, extraordinary wildflowers, outstanding waterfalls, rolling vineyards, sparkling alpine lakes, sweeping views)
 - ii) Ample options for outdoor activity (5-8 days of activity, 3-7 hours per day, with very little driving between each).
 - (1) Hiking (easy, moderate, or strenuous)
 - (2) Sea kayaking (beginner to moderate)
 - (3) River rafting (class III-V)
 - iii) Destination offers *Adventure Travel* appeal
 - (1) Includes some element of physical, emotional or cultural risk
 - (2) The more difficult to obtain on one's own, the more appealing the adventure
 - iv) Cultural interest (NOTE: 'cultural interest' must be genuine and authentic in nature, preferably off the tourist-beaten-track, and sincerely intended to educate and expose North Americans to local cultural interests.
 - (1) Preserved historical monuments with expert knowledge explanation thereof
 - (2) Musical and cultural performances
 - (3) Visits to monasteries, mosques, temples, and other places of historically significant worship
 - (4) Visits to family-run vineyards, with tasting
 - (5) Visits with family-hosted agritourism, with meal

- v) Reasonably comfortable climate, or climate which can be made comfortable with appropriate clothing & gear
 - c) Developed Infrastructure
 - i) Transportation
 - (1) Roads are safe and well maintained
 - (2) Highways are safe and well maintained
 - (3) Railroads are safe and well maintained
 - (4) Sufficient necessary public transportation (bus, lift, tram, subway, etc...)
 - (5) Airports offer access from major Western European destinations (via Paris, Frankfurt, Geneva, etc.)
 - (6) Walking/hiking paths
 - (a) Well-marked!
 - (b) Well maintained!
 - (c) Located in scenically appealing areas!!!
 - (d) Destination offers several hiking options in several regions or parks!
 - (e) Hiking trails are adequate for hikes of 3-7 hours at a time!
 - ii) Adequate public emergency services
 - (1) Emergency communication and response system is in place
 - (2) Reputable, well-equipped hospitals are established within reasonably close location (helicopter distance)
 - d) Safety
 - i) Destination is generally welcoming and friendly to North Americans
 - ii) Destination is reasonably low-risk to North American (and other) travelers
 - (1) Stable political environment
 - (2) Free from known outbreaks of infectious disease
 - (3) Cleared of landmines in areas of tourist interest
 - (4) Relatively low crime rate
 - iii) Reliable emergency response (see point c.ii.1)
 - e) Environmentally and socially responsible tourism
 - i) Service providers practice environmentally responsible, low impact tourism (leave no trace)
 - ii) Keepers of livestock practice humane treatment of work animals and tourist interest animals
 - iii) Service providers are subject to just and fair employment standards
- 2) Destination Service Provider readiness
- a) Fluent in English language
 - b) Experienced and professional inbound outfitters
 - i) Has network of dependable, professional service providers
 - (1) Local guides
 - (2) Active tour guides and services
 - (3) Equipment rental and gear suppliers
 - (4) Access to city tour guides
 - (5) Transportation professionals
 - (6) Trusted accommodation providers
 - (7) Meal preparation services

- ii) Adjusts services as necessary to accommodate North American market demands
- iii) Has a 'can-do' attitude, and works with American outbound tour operators as a team
- iv) Extremely reliable and dependable work ethic 24-7
- v) Follows-up with requests in a timely and efficient manner
- vi) Considers him/herself responsible for the quality of the performance of his/her network of service providers
- vii) Invoices outbound outfitter accurately
- c) Local Guides
 - i) Expert knowledge of destination
 - ii) Licensed for Wilderness Response and First Aid
 - iii) Ability to exercise excellent judgment under pressure and be resourceful when dealing with emergency situations
 - iv) Effective communication skills
 - v) Enthusiastic and good humored
 - vi) Experienced and professional
 - vii) Supportive and thoughtful
 - viii) Ability to troubleshoot unexpected complications with regards to itinerary logistics, without diminishing client trip experience
 - ix) Versed in the desires and needs of American travelers
 - x) Patient with varying personalities and has ability to assist in a successful group dynamic
 - xi) Ability to build group confidence necessary for successful completion of potentially dangerous activities.
- d) Active tour providers
 - i) Highly trained and experienced in the specific activity which they are offering (kayaking, hiking, rafting, etc...)
 - ii) Licensed for Wilderness Response and First Aid
 - iii) Equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and gear, sufficient to accommodate groups of 6 – 16 people at a time
 - iv) Offers activities that are appropriate to the local environment
 - v) Offers activities which have been requested by group tour operators, and are in demand by North American travelers
- e) Local Transportation Providers
 - i) Necessary credentials and licenses
 - ii) Excellent safety standards and records
 - iii) Comfortable seating & climate control
 - iv) Can accommodate groups of 6 – 16
 - v) Reliable and punctual
 - vi) Able to transport clients and luggage for the duration of an 8-12 day itinerary
- f) Lodging/Accommodations
 - i) 3-4 Star rated hotels, inns, B&B's, and agritourism accommodations
 - ii) Highly preferred to offers group rates
 - iii) Blocks rooms of up to 6 – 16 people several months in advance, and honors reservations

- iv) Can accommodate groups of 6 – 16 at a single lodging, without dividing the group into multiple lodgings
 - (1) Offers combination of rooms which can accommodate:
 - (a) Twins beds
 - (b) Double beds
 - (c) Single travelers
 - (d) Triples (not mandatory, but preferred)
- v) Comfortable
 - (1) Functioning climate control
 - (2) Common space for social interaction of the group (lobby, dining area, library, etc..)
 - (3) Dependably clean linens and towels
- vi) Safe
 - (1) Drinkable tap water, or complimentary bottled water
 - (2) Guestrooms can be locked/secured by guests
 - (3) Room includes a safe and/or valuables can be safeguarded at reception
 - (4) Location of accommodation is considered safe for wondering to/from
- vii) Appealing location
 - (1) Centrally located in villages of interest, and/or...
 - (2) Located in an area of scenic beauty
 - (3) Conveniently located near trailheads and/or kayaking/rafting put-in
- viii) Privacy
 - (1) Guestrooms have private baths
 - (2) Non-dormitory style guestrooms
- ix) Essential amenities
 - (1) Private bathrooms
 - (a) Clean and sanitary
 - (b) Functioning plumbing
 - (c) ‘Western’ toilets
 - (d) Shower with decent water pressure and adequate temperature control
 - (e) Hair dryers in bathrooms are not mandatory, but highly desirable
 - (2) Beds
 - (a) Comfortable mattress
 - (b) Clean linens, changed daily
 - (c) Mattress large enough for North American adults (recommend 80-84” length minimum)
 - (3) Noise level
 - (a) Street noise to a minimum (double-pane windows very desirable)
 - (b) Guestroom sound isolation adequate
 - (4) Communication
 - (a) Internet access highly desirable
 - (b) Telephone access highly desirable
 - (5) Service staff
 - (a) Cheerful and welcoming
 - (b) Patient with differing personalities
 - (c) Accepting of differing nationalities

- (d) Accommodating
- (e) Available
- x) Interior (guestrooms or common areas) does NOT smell of cigarette smoke.
MTS will not select lodging which smells of cigarette smoke within interiors
- g) Cuisine/Dining
 - i) Hygienically safe and responsible prepared meals
 - ii) Quality ingredients – fresh, and organic when possible
 - iii) Aesthetically pleasing presentation of meals if possible
 - iv) Regionally inspired specialties
 - v) Sensitivity to American dietary standards
 - (1) Ample portions
 - (a) 3 Meals per day (breakfast, lunch, dinner)
 - (b) Snacks during hikes to maintain physical endurance/energy
 - (2) Meals include produce (salads, fruit, tomatoes, etc.)
 - (3) All meals avoid regional specialties that are dramatically different from the common North American palette (i.e. insects, brain, raw eggs and seafood, guinea pig, etc.).
 - vi) Variety
 - vii) Ability to accommodate vegetarian diets (The North American definition of vegetarian excludes red meat AND fish)
 - viii) Clean, drinkable water always provided with every meal, and during hikes and other trip activities
- 3) Destination leaves traveler with a *wow* feeling, and the desire to return.

SLAVONIA

Visitor impressions:

- 1) Destination appeals to outbound active group tour clientele for reasons:
 - a) Unique destination
 - i) Destination is not commonly offered by the American active tourism market – offers something new to the seasoned traveler
 - b) Enticing destination
 - i) Learning potential
 - (1) Remaining damaged structures from the conflicts of the 1990's is historically significant to travelers who watched on the news from afar
 - ii) Wine roads outside of Osijek are unique and beautiful
 - (1) Cellars built into the Earth behind winery tasting rooms are unique to North America and impressive
 - (2) Fine quality, locally produced Croatian wine is not easily obtained in the United States
 - (3) Wineries are mostly family-run, and filled with family history – very appealing to North American visitors
 - iii) Preserved town centers with Baroque architecture and ample space for gathering very appealing
 - c) Developed Infrastructure
 - i) Roads seem to be well maintained
 - ii) Towns are accessible from main highways
 - iii) Zagreb Airport with several international flights into Croatia
 - d) Slavonia feels safe
- 2) Key cultural attractions include:
 - a) Baranja wine roads, exploring wine cellars and visiting family farms
 - b) Agritourism: Abundance of local agriculture make Osijek a gastronomical highlight. Local dishes, including traditional Slavonian-style specialties (kulen, paprika-flavored sausage, other kinds of sausages, ham, bacon, dairy products), as well as venison and fish dishes such as the famous riblji paprikaš (fish stew made with paprika) are very attractive to North American travelers.
 - i) Home-cooked lunches from family-farm ingredients (i.e. Slavonska Kuca)
 - ii) Dinner at Kormoran restaurant in Bilje very fun
 - c) Villages with preserved evidence of the conflicts of the 1990s uniquely interesting and worth visiting
 - i) Osijek
 - ii) Vukovar
 - (1) NOTE: Recommend Slavonia preserve certain structures and gathering areas which have obvious visual evidence of the Croatian War of Independence, specifically during the 87-day siege of the Croatian city of Vukovar by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), supported by various Serbian paramilitary forces, between August-November 1991.

Memorializing this event in such away serves the purpose of educating other nationalities of important historic events in our World's history; and is uniquely fascinating to travelers who want a learning aspect to their travel experience. The very deep emotional impact North Americans experience when seeing for the first time the reality of such events only witnessed on TV back in the United States is long lasting, and memorable.

- 3) Destination Service Provider readiness
 - a) A few experienced and professional inbound outfitters
 - b) Local Transportation Providers out of Zagreb
 - c) Lodging/Accommodations
 - i) Waldinger Hotel in Osijek is good for MTS groups
 - d) Cuisine/Dining
 - i) Cuisine is excellent, specifically Slavonian-style specialties (kulen, paprika-flavored sausage, other kinds of sausages, ham, bacon, dairy products), as well as venison and fish dishes such as the famous riblji paprika (fish stew made with paprika).
 - ii) The Osijek beer (Eseker) and Baranja wines are excellent
 - iii) Plenty of possibilities to develop agritourism with fresh home-prepared meals

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Slavonia could be very appealing to the off-the-beaten path, active traveler. However, there is very little maneuverability between each attraction, which does not require an automobile.

Mountain Travel Sobek would like to spend 1-2 days in Slavonia hiking scenic trails through vineyards and along country roads, staying in agritouristic accommodations at night, and stopping en route in piazzas of historic significance, in family-run vineyards, and with minimal driving between each destination

We need:

- 1) ENGLISH SPEAKING SERVICE PROVIDERS
- 2) Inbound tourism readiness
- 3) Well-maintained walking trails linking village-to-village, winery-to-winery through beautiful landscapes
- 4) Accommodations (preferably agritourism) at points along the way, which would allow for groups to hike inn-to-inn
- 5) Several dining options which entice North American travelers
 - i) Fresh, local ingredients
 - ii) High quality meals
 - iii) Vegetarian options
 - iv) Ability to select from a menu, or from preselected options

Attractions in need of improvement:

- 1) Lipizzaner horse breeding facility and riding stables – at this time, MTS would not include this facility in a tour to Slavonia

- a) Tours should focus on the history, habits, and care of the stallions
 - b) Tours should avoid discussions of stable maintenance and future building plans, which are uninteresting to tourists, and take from the primary focus of interest - the horses
 - c) Animals need to be well cared for and treated in a cruel-free, humane manner
 - d) Travelers would rather see horses being ridden, and roaming in pastures, than have a walking tour of horses in their stalls
 - e) Horses need to be healthy and in excellent condition (there was a horse with a large, open wound in one of the stalls I visited, and had no bandaging, and there was no explanation of what had happened to the horse, or how it was being taken care of)
- 2) National Park visited outside of Osijek (Cormoranth birds, and motorboat ride) – at this time, MTS would not include this facility in a tour to Slavonia
- a) This park did not have enough to see to warrant a stop here
 - b) The motor boats are very loud, which is very unappealing in a serene, natural setting
 - c) Our guide smoked
- 3) Danube River based activities
- a) The one section of the Danube River I visited was absolutely mosquito infested – I have not seen the areas of the Danube which are not swarming with mosquitoes
 - b) I did not experience an activity on the Danube River. We took a 15-minute Jeep ride to the waters edge, during which time we applied mosquito repellent for a longer duration of time than we spent looking at the river

ISTRIA

Visitor impressions:

- 1) Destination appeals to outbound active group tour clientele for reasons:
 - a) Feels uniquely Croatia (NOT like Tuscany), uniquely Adriatic, and uniquely Eastern European
 - b) Pristine countryside of coastal views from landscapes adorned in bellflowers, mustard, orchids, olive trees, wild sage, and other herbs and wildflowers of vibrant color
 - i) Ucka/Skitaca (Labin) very beautiful
 - c) Picturesque medieval villages perched above beautiful hilly landscapes
 - i) Motovun
 - ii) Buje
 - iii) Pazin
 - d) Coastal villages, with cafes and gathering areas overlooking the Adriatic
 - e) Vineyards and orchards, lovely to meander through on foot or by bicycle
 - f) Farmer's Markets selling local produce and regional specialties (honey, cheese, olives, breads, figs, etc.)
 - g) Well maintained roads
 - h) Feels very safe to visitors
- 2) Destination Service Provider readiness
- 3) Potential inbound outfitters – several willing and able, dedicated professionals ready to accept incoming American tour groups (some training required to ensure familiarity of North American traveler expectations, and provide confident ability to meet expectations)
 - a) Eko Adventure
 - b) Ready and available local guides (some training required to ensure familiarity of North American traveler expectations, and provide confident ability to meet expectations)
 - c) Ready and available active tour providers (some training required to ensure familiarity of North American traveler expectations, and provide confident ability to meet expectations)
 - d) Reliable and dependable transportation professionals in place
 - e) Lodging/Accommodations
 - i) Ready and available 3 and 4-Star hotels in central locations
 - (1) Astoria Design Hotel very nice
 - ii) Very impressive potential for agritourism lodging, given some adjustments to allow for groups of 6-16 at one accommodation with private bathrooms
 - (1) Authentic, locally inspired meals prepared in a family dining style (wonderful!)
 - (a) home-cooked by resident/owner
 - (b) garden-grown ingredients
 - (c) Ability to witness preparation of meals and interact with cooks in a casual setting
 - (2) Living accommodations presented as if staying with family

- (a) in-home and/or guesthouse accommodations
- (b) private yards and gathering spaces
- (c) Rustic but comfortable setting
 - (i) living areas instead of lobby/lounge gathering space, promoting conversation and intimate personal experience with home owners
 - (d) decor is casual but aesthetically pleasing – feels like home
- 4) Destination leaves traveler with a *wow* feeling, and the desire to return – absolutely!
 - a) Comfortable
 - b) Safe
 - c) Scenic
 - d) Uniquely Croatian

I would love to return to Istria!

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Istria has so much to offer in scenic beauty, gastronomy, national parks, accommodations, and transportation. The region is very appealing to North American travelers for these reasons.

However, Istria needs to develop more options for the hiker/walker to entice group travelers who call Mountain Travel Sobek for active hiking trips.

Mountain Travel Sobek would like to spend 3-4 days in Istria hiking scenic trails with views of the Adriatic, staying in agritouristic accommodations at night, and stopping en route in villages in the country and along the coast with minimal driving between each destination

We need:

- 1) ENGLISH SPEAKING SERVICE PROVIDERS
- 2) Inbound tourism readiness
- 3) A system of well marked trails through national parks, which result in 3–7 hours of safe, scenically beautiful hiking
- 4) Accommodations (preferably agritourism) at points along the way, which would allow for groups to hike inn-to-inn, and which can also accommodate groups of 6-16 people in a mix of double, twin, and single rooms

DALMATIA

Visitor impressions:

- 1) Destination appeals to outbound active group tour clientele for reasons:
 - a) Beautiful landscapes, combining islands, mountains, medieval villages, and the sea – gorgeous!
 - b) Lots to experience for active travelers
 - (1) Hiking opportunities through beautiful orchards, olive groves, mountain landscapes, country trails, etc...
 - (2) Plenty of sea kayaking possibilities for all levels
 - c) Excellent local ingredients available for extraordinary meals
 - d) Dubrovnik is a place of popular, historic interest
 - e) Feels safe
- 2) Destination Service Provider readiness
 - a) English language much more common than in other regions of Croatia
 - b) Potential inbound outfitters – several willing and able, dedicated professionals ready to accept incoming American tour groups
 - c) Ready and available local guides – some training needed to clarify perception of North American traveler expectations
 - d) Ready and available active tour providers– some training needed to clarify perception of North American traveler expectations
 - e) Reliable and dependable transportation professionals
 - f) Ready and available 3 and 4-Star hotels in central locations
 - g) Cuisine/Dining
- 3) Destination leaves traveler with a *wow* feeling, and the desire to return

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Dalmatia has so much to offer in scenic beauty, gastronomy, national parks, accommodations, and transportation. The region very appealing to North American travelers for the reasons stated above.

Dalmatia needs to develop more options for the hiker/walker to entice group travelers who call Mountain Travel Sobek for active trips.

Mountain Travel Sobek would like to spend 5-7 days along the mainland and on the islands of Dalmatia hiking scenic trails, staying in agritouristic accommodations and 3 and 4-star hotels at night, stopping en route in villages in the country and along the coast with minimal driving between each destination.

Mountain Travel Sobek would like to spend 2-3 days kayaking along the scenic coastline of the islands and the mainland Dalmatia, staying in agritouristic accommodations and 3 and 4-star hotels at night, stopping en route in villages in the country and along the coast with minimal driving between each destination.

We need:

- 1) ENGLISH SPEAKING SERVICE PROVIDERS
- 2) Inbound tourism readiness
- 3) A system of well marked trails through national parks, which result in 3–7 hours of safe, scenic hiking
- 4) Well preserved and safe walking paths leading to villages and agritourisms
- 5) In-bound outfitters who can safely and reliably support groups of 6-16 people kayaking the most scenic kayaking areas
- 6) Accommodations (preferably agritourism) throughout to allow for less driving between each hiking/walking destination, which allow for groups of 6-16 people in a mix of double, twin, and single accommodations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING:

The regions of Croatia I've visited are all uniquely appealing to North American active travelers for the reasons outlined in this document.

Inexperienced in-bound outfitters and service providers should be trained in guide and in-bound outfitter readiness.

I recommend that USAID or other government subsidized agency support a systematic approach to training inbound outfitters, guides, and service providers in order to support and maintain necessary levels of tourism service, accommodation, and safety standards. This training should be on going in order to continually educate new generations of service providers who will work to maintain the tourism industry in Croatia,

My recommendation is as follows:

- 1) Identify tourism training experts
- 2) Provide intensive training to those individuals in order to teach tourism essentials and basics
 - a) Send head trainers on a Mountain Travel Sobek trip for familiarization
 - b) Hold a tourism training workshop for these future tourism training experts
- 3) Establish classes/schools focused on the travel industry, and taught by the trained experts listed in point-2
 - a) Guide certification
 - i) Obtaining Wilderness safety and preparedness
 - ii) First Aid responsiveness
 - iii) Hospitality and service
 - iv) Patience and graciousness
 - b) Inbound outfitter 'how-to' workshops and training basics
 - c) Hotel and agritourism industry standards and service
 - d) Marketing and publicity
 - e) Website installation and maintenance
 - f) Managing expectations
 - g) Identifying and serving North American tourism market demands
 - h) Fluency in English Language

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the support staff on this familiarization trip.

Michelle Morgan, for always checking in with me personally to be sure I was seeing what I needed to see, and learning what I needed to learn. I sincerely appreciated Michelle's efforts to make the very best use of my time.

Miroslav "Miro" Levanic, for *everything*. For taking care of all of our needs, and for doing this with a smile. He's wonderful.

Aleksandra "Alek" Andrakovic, for bridging the communication gap, and being our voice at the workshops. Alek did a magnificent job.

Sinisa Bronic, for always being there for us, and constantly surprising us with new details we didn't expect (i.e. making sure the waitperson left the wine on the table, so we can look at the labels and learn more about the wine).

Manuela Hrvatin, for being an outstanding tour guide in Istria, sharing her vast knowledge of this part of the world, and showing us what a beautiful area Istria is. Because of Manuela, our groups will definitely include Istria in our future tour to Croatia.

Igor Stari, for his thoughtful input about Croatia and service providers, and for his excellent off-road driving skills!

Mario Bebek, for his guidance and good conversation.

Petra Potocnik, for her assistance herding us around.

Tomislav Zubcic, for his safe driving, and for putting up with us the entire time with no complaints.

And the rest of the team, dinner hosts, cooks, technical support, and behind-the-scenes staff! The USAID Croatia Tourism Product Development and Marketing team did an outstanding job of multi-tasking throughout what must have been a tremendously challenging program logistically. Last-minute requests were accommodated (i.e. my desire to hike the cliffs within view of Brac the morning of our Dalmatia workshop), luggage was lifted, itineraries were adjusted (at our request), all seemingly effortlessly (though we know this could not be the case), and with complete professionalism, beginning to end.

This is a tremendous group of travel professionals, and any one of the people mentioned above would be an excellent tourism training expert if they chose this path for themselves. Otherwise, they simply deserve applause for a job very well done.

Thank you!

Anne Wood
Mountain Travel Sobek