

CROATIA

TOURISM RECOVERY

THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA TOURISM RECOVERY

In 1991, executives who in 1997 founded Global Communicators, LLC, were retained by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Tourism to stem the breakdown of the tourism industry in Croatia as a result of the war waged by Serbia against the breakaway republics that comprised former Yugoslavia.

Virtually overnight in 1991 following the military onslaught by the Yugoslav army, the tourism sector tumbled from the largest economic sector, reaching US\$5 billion annually, to almost zero. This was a financial blow to the country that, with 1,000 islands along its 3,625 miles (5,835 km) of Adriatic coastline, depended on tourism for its livelihood.

In December 1991, as the world watched on CNN, the Serbs shelled the ancient walled city of Dubrovnik, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the citizens of Dubrovnik evacuated by small boats to the islands. Serious damage was done to the terra cotta rooftops that were the city's trademark. Historic buildings imploded from the artillery barrages, and major damage was done to the famed stradun, the main street promenade millions of visitors strolled along each year, and the fabled esplanade that circled the city. The ensuing war crippled the tourism industry for months, as the Serbs attacked Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo following a Croatian ceasefire in February 1992.

The GC strategy centered on bringing American travel writers to Dubrovnik to see for themselves what had happened and what was being done to restore the walled city of Dubrovnik, the country's most noteworthy tourism destination visited by hundreds of cruise ships and thousands of American tourists before the war.

Over a five year period, we organized and conducted 23 press trips with more than 60 travel and tourism journalists that resulted in an advertising equivalence of \$4 million in U.S. media coverage. Many articles were



featured in full-page spreads in the Sunday travel sections of major daily newspapers across the United States. A number of journalists, affected by coverage of the war at home, thought it might be unsafe to travel to Croatia. But they came on our trips and saw that Croatia was safe, economical, and still beautiful. (or unbowed – is that what you meant?). Returning home, they wrote stories that stirred the interest of the American people, and tourism began to recover.

Another strategy GC employed was to work jointly with the American Society of Travel Agents and Atlas Travel of Croatia to form the Rebuild Dubrovnik Fund, a U.S. nonprofit that raised more than \$100,000 to restore the terra cotta rooftops through a “Buy a Tile for Dubrovnik” campaign, endorsed by the respected British actor Michael York, who served as honorary chairman from 1996 to 1999. The effort brought together the U.S. travel industry to literally help rebuild tourism in Croatia.

Today Croatia's tourism is thriving. With more than 10 million foreign tourists annually, tourism generates revenue in excess of US\$12.5 billion (€7 billion). Croatia is ranked among the top 20 most popular tourist destinations in the world and was voted the world's top tourism destination in 2005 by Lonely Planet.