



Good Practice Story Title: A ticket that opens doors of the Lika Destination – branding initiative for sustainable tourism development

Destination: Lika

Country: Croatia

Submitting Organization: Plitvice Lakes National Park

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

In mountainous Croatia, where karst and water create fantastic scenes, where the tallest trees in Croatia grow, and the forest habitats are home to wolves and bears, lies the Lika destination. Traveling through this destination, you will have the opportunity to experience a unique combination of contrasts in just 30 minutes of driving, because here, in an area of only 6796 km², three types of climate alternate: Mediterranean, continental, and mountain. Rich in natural phenomena at all levels of protection, Lika destination is located in the NATURA 2000 ecological network, with almost 60% of its area covered. However, many of its natural treasures are still being discovered by world travelers, especially those who want to experience peace far from the stress of urban environments, enjoy local food, and witness traditions preserved by one of the least populated areas of Croatia. The difficult living conditions of the old people of Lika meant that many of them moved around the world "in search of bread", leaving the area with only 11 inhabitants per km². Economic underdevelopment is slowly being mitigated by tourism, which many see as a way of survival for themselves and their children, who are often separated from the rural environment by schooling in cities.

In addition to the Plitvice Lakes National Park, one of the most beautiful national parks in Europe and the world, this area hosts two more national parks, a nature park, and three tourist cave locations, making the Lika Destination a place with a great wealth of geomorphological phenomena, biodiversity, and attractive untouched nature.





Tourism in this area began to develop at the end of the 19th century, precisely at the Plitvice Lakes, which in 1949 became the largest and oldest National Park in the Republic of Croatia. In 1979, they were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Today, Plitvice Lakes National Park is visited by about 10% of all tourists who visit the Republic of Croatia, in some years exceeding 1.5 million visitors. Other tourist-attractive protected areas of the Lika destination, including Northern Velebit National Park, Paklenica National Park, Velebit Nature Park (with 2 localities Zavratinica Bay and Cerovac Caves), Grabovača Cave Park, and Barač Caves record a much smaller number of visitors and are financially dependent on state funds. Nevertheless, each of these areas has its own natural peculiarities that are extremely attractive for various forms of sustainable tourism.

Although each of these protected areas individually has great tourist potential, the Plitvice Lakes National Park has the opportunity to present the Lika destination to a significant number of visitors from all over the world and thus disperse visits to less developed areas.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

While the Plitvice Lakes National Park is visited by over a million tourists a year, with an increased number of visitors during the peak season, the Lika destination has many other unexplored and lesser-known natural resources. In cooperation with the Lika Destination Cluster and nine attractive locations within the Lika destination, a joint ticket for the Lika destination has been created since 2018, organized and supported by the Plitvice Lakes National Park's marketing efforts. The visibility of the tourist offerings of lesser-known locations is gradually increasing, presenting numerous opportunities for guests to extend their stay in the destination.

Issues faced:

Lika destination, due to its geographical and traffic location, was until recently a tourist transit area, a way station towards the sea, where a large number of tourists exclusively visit the Plitvice Lakes National Park. Although this national park is one of the main tourist attractions of the Republic of Croatia, the Lika destination has many other tourist facilities for an active holiday in nature and experiencing local culture.

The large concentration of visitors to the Plitvice Lakes creates problems of mass tourism, where the management of the Plitvice Lakes National Park faces the challenges of harmonizing the increased arrivals with the preservation of natural resources of unique universal value. At the same time, there are protected areas with extraordinary natural beauty in the surroundings, which are mostly unknown to visitors. These areas need support in promotion to develop the lesser-known parts of the destination, extend the stay of guests, ensure better dispersion of visitors within the Lika destination, and consequently reduce the pressure on the most visited tourist areas.



Solution:

With the help of the Plitvice Lakes National Park and its distinctive brand, the Lika destination Cluster and all protected areas within the Lika destination have decided to jointly launch the branding of those parts of the Lika destination that are lesser-known and underdeveloped in terms of tourism. They created a joint ticket for the Lika destination, which includes entrance to all protected areas and is valid for several months during the main summer season. This ticket can be purchased at the Plitvice Lakes National Park (at the entrances and on the Park's website). The Plitvice Lakes National Park was also the best choice for the technical implementation of the solution because it has software for web shop ticket sales that has been upgraded for the new product. Every guest who decides to buy a joint ticket receives a booklet with vouchers at the entrance to the Plitvice Lakes National Park, which they show at the entrances to other areas. With a more favorable ticket price than the sum of the regular prices, we aim to encourage a longer stay in the destination. According to the report of the Croatian Institute for Tourism (<https://www.htz.hr/sites/default/files/2023-12/TOMAS%20Hrvatska%202022%20-%202023.pdf>, p. 104), in 2023, 40.2% of guests went on self-organized excursions, which makes the joint ticket project a suitable model for guests visiting the Lika destination.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

In February 2017, the Lika Destination Cluster was formed with the aim of branding Lika as a destination of protected areas and a gastronomic destination. With the basic purpose of promoting tourism in the destination, the Lika Destination Cluster held several meetings with all directors of protected areas during 2017 and 2018, from which the mutual idea of creating a joint ticket emerged. In addition to protected areas, the Croatian Center for Autochthonous Species of Karst Fish and Crayfish and the Nikola Tesla Memorial Center were involved in the branding. This way, the brand of our world-famous scientist Nikola Tesla, who was born in the area of the Lika destination, is included in the promotion of the entire destination.

The Plitvice Lakes National Park, as the place with the largest number of visitors in the destination, which is independently financed and has all the necessary IT tools to create a new product, became the main organizer for the establishment of the Joint Ticket. The steps are as follows:

- An initial email to all protected areas to establish interest in participation, agree on the duration, and price of the joint ticket.
- The legal service of the Plitvice Lakes National Park drafts agreements with all areas that state the prices and terms of cooperation.
- The Plitvice Lakes National Park marketing service, in cooperation with an external company, creates a new product based on the existing software - a joint ticket for sale at the entrances



- and on the Park's website, and prints all materials (posters, leaflets, and booklets with vouchers).
- Areas included in the joint ticket promote the joint ticket on their websites.

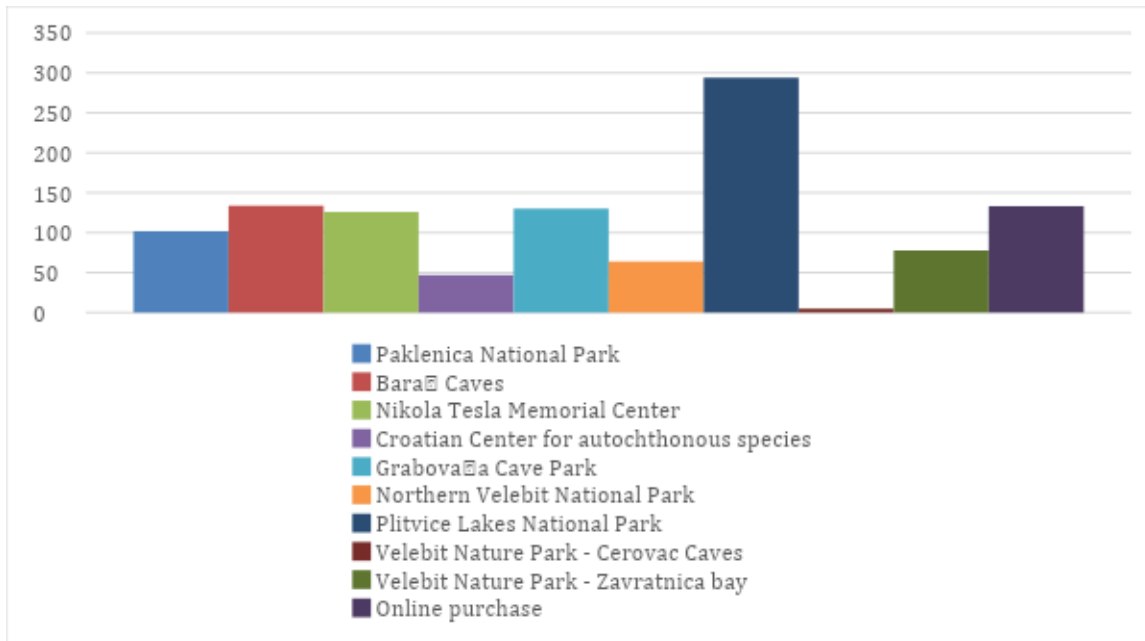
In the summer of 2018, the first joint ticket went on sale. Funds from ticket sales are transferred from the Plitvice Lakes National Park account to the other areas included in the joint ticket at the end of the sales period.

Achievements and Results:

The joint ticket project is the first and currently the only example of this type of cooperation in the Lika destination. It is recognized among the holders of tourist content as an excellent way of promoting the destination from the well-known and highly visited to the lesser-known and less visited. In this way, visitors who plan to visit the Lika destination, as well as those who are already in the destination, are given the opportunity to get to know and explore its attractions at a much more favorable price than what they would normally pay. To the invitation of the Plitvice Lakes National Park to participate in the joint ticket project, all other protected areas have responded positively so far, as this method of promotion benefits everyone: Plitvice Lakes National Park for the dispersion of visitors in conditions of large crowds during the summer season, and other included areas for increasing visibility on the tourist market of the Lika destination.

According to available statistics, from 2020 to today, 1,113 tickets have been sold. Considering that the joint ticket is valid for 9 areas within the Lika destination, visitors most often did not visit all 9 areas during the validity of the joint ticket. Below is a graph showing the usage of tickets by area from 2020 to 2022, indicating which areas were more or less visited in this period. However, online sales still do not record sales by area, which is one of the future steps to improve the monitoring of the realization of this project.





Graph with the number of tickets sold by protected areas from 2020 to 2022

This initiative of joint promotion of the destination is planned for the long term, i.e., every year for the high season from June or July to October. It is too early to talk about a significant impact on better dispersion of guests and on prolonging their stay in the destination. Nevertheless, continuous work on improving the visibility of all localities and presenting their tourist content in the Plitvice Lakes National Park as the most visited location is an example of slow but steady progress towards the sustainable development of the entire destination. Preparations are currently underway to define the price of the joint ticket for 2024.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

- The more important a locality is for tourism, the greater its responsibility in solving the sustainability problem of the entire destination. In this context, the Plitvice Lakes National Park is the initiator, with management open to forms of cooperation that support the local community.
- Non-financial effects in this initiative have priority for the Plitvice Lakes National Park. Different priorities in the sustainability of all areas can create a common solution; the will and cooperation of all stakeholders are essential.



- It is necessary to include participation in the joint ticket in the plans for the upcoming season in a timely manner, define the price with which each area wants to participate, and start negotiations early enough.
- When establishing a ticket sales system, it is necessary to establish adequate statistical monitoring at the same time.

Recognitions and Additional References

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