

SWOT Analysis and Related Countermeasures for Croatia to Explore the Chinese Tourist Source Market

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Abstract

Croatia is a land endowed with rich and diversified natural and cultural tourist resources. Traveling around Croatia, I was stunned by its beauty. However, I noticed that there were few Chinese tourists in Croatia. How can we bring more Chinese tourists to Croatia? How can we make them happy and comfortable in Croatia? And, at the same time, how can we avoid polluting this tract of pure land? Based on first-hand research work, I make a SWOT analysis of the Chinese tourist source market of Croatia and put forward related countermeasures from the perspective of a native Chinese. The positioning of tourism in Croatia should be ingeniously packaged. I recommend developing diversified and specialized tourist products, various marketing and promotional activities, simple and flexible visa policies and regulations, and other related measures to further explore the Chinese tourist source market of Croatia.

KEY WORDS:

SWOT analysis, Croatia, Chinese tourist source market, sustainable tourism, direct flight

Introduction

I worked in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, for three years. During my stay, I walked almost all around Croatia. I travelled in Dalmatia for two weeks, visiting Zadar, Šibenik, Skradin, Trogir, Split, Hvar, Korčula and Dubrovnik. I toured Istria for a week, visiting Opatija, Pula, Rovinj and Poreč. I have also been to Plitvička jezera, Varaždin, Karlovac, Slavonski Brod, Osijek and other scenic spots in and around Zagreb. I also experienced the carnival in Rijeka. I was stunned by the beauty of Croatia. I was respected and trusted by the kind and friendly Croats.

However, I noticed that there were few Chinese tourists in Croatia. Most tourists were European. Only a few were Asian, and they mostly came from the Republic of Korea and Japan. How can we bring more Chinese tourists to Croatia? How can we make them happy and comfortable in Croatia? And, at the same time, how can we avoid polluting this tract of pure land? These questions are worth thinking about. I made a search for relevant information and data online, went to the Croatian National Tourist Board to get the statistics, and consulted academic experts, industry figures and local residents. Based on first-hand research work, I make a SWOT analysis of the Chinese tourist source market of Croatia and put forward related countermeasures from the perspective of a native Chinese.

Strength analysis

Tourist resources

Rich and diversified natural and cultural tourist resources of Croatia

Legend has it that when giving out land God forgot about Croatians. He had to compensate them with the most beautiful land on Earth which he had kept for himself. It is a land endowed with rich and diversified natural

and cultural tourist resources. The mysterious land is full of alien appeal, amazingly dotted with lavender, agave, olive grove and vineyard, which is most attractive and stimulating.

Nautical tourism along the Adriatic Sea is most significant. The west coast along the Adriatic Sea is picturesque and blue, featuring sea, sunshine and sand. Opatija was the first holiday resort. Later a large number of resorts sprang up along the coast and numerous islands. Hvar is rated as one of the ten most beautiful islands in the world. There are a total of 99 Blue Flag beaches (a world-renowned eco-label trusted by millions around the globe) and 19 marinas in 2017, the number of awarded sites ranking the 10th in the world (Blue Flag 2017). Croatia is world famous for naturism. It was the first European country to develop commercial naturist resorts. Quite a few visitors are involved in the industry of naturism.

Inland areas offer mountain resorts, agro-tourism and spas. The mountains in the middle are tranquil and green. The plains in the eastern part are fertile and golden. Zagreb is also a significant tourist destination.

Croatia boasts 15 UNESCO intangible cultural heritages¹, ranking the first in Europe, such as lacemaking, gingerbread craft, the festivity of the patron of Dubrovnik, and the Procession following the cross in Hvar. Croatia has 8 UNESCO cultural sites, such as the old city of Dubrovnik,

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1 Namely,

Community project of safeguarding the living culture of Rovinj/Rovigno: the Batana Ecomuseum
Mediterranean diet

Klapa multipart singing of Dalmatia, southern Croatia

Bećarac singing and playing from Eastern Croatia

Nijemo Kolo, silent circle dance of the Dalmatian hinterland

Ojkanje singing

Gingerbread craft from Northern Croatia

Sinjska Alka, a knights' tournament in Sinj

Two-part singing and playing in the Istrian scale

Festivity of Saint Blaise, the patron of Dubrovnik

Traditional manufacturing of children's wooden toys in Hrvatsko Zagorje

Spring procession of Ljelje/Kraljice (queens) from Gorjani

Procession Za križen ('following the cross') on the island of Hvar

Annual carnival bell ringers' pageant from the Kastav area

Lacemaking in Croatia

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Intangible Cultural Heritage 2017.

Diocletian Palace in Split and the old city of Trogir. Besides, it has ² UNESCO natural heritages, namely, Plitvice Lakes National Park and Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests.² This is especially outstanding, miraculous and incredible, for Croatia is indeed a small country, both demographically and geographically.

In addition, Croatia has set up 8 national parks (for example, Brijuni, Krka, Mljet and Plitvička jezera) and 11 nature parks, such as Medvednica, Papuk and Kopački rit (Croatia: Full of life 2017). Ancient and medieval architecture of diversified styles are well preserved here, imbued with profound historical and cultural insight. Croatia offers gastronomical delights, especially seafood, such as salmon, squid, octopus, shrimp, seabass and cuttlefish, all really fresh and tasty. Moreover, people can enjoy trekking, hiking, sailing, diving, parasailing, sea kayaking and adventurous rock climbing.

Developing diversified and specialized tourist products and souvenirs

It is recommended that Croatia strengthen cooperation with Chinese travel agencies, establishing long-term strategic partnerships. General group sightseeing products are traditional and can be further expanded. Local Croatian travel agencies may apply to be qualified as travel agencies which can receive Chinese tourist groups. Also, an attempt should be made to include one or two top Croatian scenic spots (for example Dubrovnik, Split or Plitvička jezera) in the itineraries of major Chinese travel agencies in Europe (such as Panda, Mandarin Voyages, even Omega and Wang Dynasty), most possibly, to be included in their sightseeing itineraries in Southern Europe, together with Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary etc. Furthermore, attempts should be made to cooperate with certified organizing travel agencies in China, to include one or two top Croatian

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2 Namely,
 Historical complex of Split with the Palace of Diocletian
 Old City of Dubrovnik
 Plitvice Lakes National Park
 Episcopal Complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in the Historic Centre of Poreč
 Historic City of Trogir
 The Cathedral of St James in Šibenik
 Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe
 Stari Grad Plain
 Stećci Medieval Tombstones Graveyards
 Venetian Works of Defence between the 16th and 17th Centuries: Stato da Terra – Western Stato da Mar
 Source: UNESCO 2017.

attractions in their sightseeing itineraries in Southern Europe.

Meanwhile, explore and develop diversified, specialized and customized tourism products. I'd like to suggest some high-end tourist products here.

A photographic tour is highly recommended. Croatia is a beautiful country for photographers. There are so many picture-perfect scenes, the blue Adriatic Sea, the imposing medieval city of Dubrovnik, and the vast expanse of purple lavender in Hvar. Moreover, there are rare European storks. The migratory birds perch beside the river Sava from April to June, and then fly to their old nests in South Africa. The endangered species is definitely appealing to photographers. The photographic tour is lucrative, as it takes time to wait for the sunset, the ice wave, and enough light.

The honeymoon tour is also alluring and profitable. Croatia is reputed as a vacation hotspot. The newly-weds may stay in Hvar, Rovinj or Brač, and enjoy the sea, sand and sunshine. They have a lot to do, swimming, eating, sailing, diving, even parasailing, sea kayaking, or just relaxing, enjoying the leisure and pleasure of life. In Starigradsko Polje of Hvar Island, they may appreciate the champaign (open country) in a hot balloon. They may experience the colorful folk culture as well.

The island-hopping tour is unique, chic and trendy, derived from classic nautical tourism. Here I'd like to introduce an itinerary in which the guests depart from Split, jump to the island of Brač, hop to the island of Hvar, then to the island of Korčula, and finally arrive in Dubrovnik. Covering major attractions of Croatia, the itinerary is both fascinating and feasible.

Food is an indispensable part, as Chinese people enjoy eating. Croatia is rich in gastronomical offer, grilled seafood, grilled meat, čevapčići (a type of kebab, with minced meat), black beer, to name just a few. Local restaurants had better prepare English menus.

Souvenirs cannot be ignored as Chinese people are crazy about shopping. Although Croatia does not have world-famous brands, it does have specialties, such as necktie, wine, olive oil, cheese, honey, lace and lavender. The souvenirs must be uniquely explored and developed, nicely packaged, and reasonably and attractively priced.

Tourist facilities and service

Agreeable infrastructure, tourist facilities and service of Croatia

The tourist attractions in Croatia are easily accessible. They can be reached conveniently by boat, plane, car, bus or train.

The accommodation is cozy and inexpensive. Some people put the sign "sobe" in front of their house, indicating that they offer "private rooms" for tourists. The private accommodation is cheap, yet clean and pleasing, sort of a home away from home.

There are information centers in every attraction, which is very informative and helpful for tourists.

Further improving tourist amenities and service

In terms of facilities, it is a good idea to provide some self-help touring gear such as bicycles for tourists, as China is a kingdom of bicycles. Also, set up English road signs and put on more English explanations in attractions. I also visited Istanbul, and we can make a comparison between Dubrovnik and Istanbul. In Istanbul, we can find an English introduction, either long or short, in almost every scenic spot. However, in Dubrovnik and other classic attractions in Croatia, very few English explanations can be found. The rich tourist resources in Croatia are not well exploited yet.

Besides, cooperate with Chinese hotels, encouraging Chinese hotel companies to invest in Croatia, providing high quality service for Chinese tourists.

With regard to service, more English-speaking guides are needed. It is also necessary to begin to train some Chinese-speaking guides. Local Chinese can serve as temporary guides. As far as I know, Croatian people do not usually keep the time. In order to provide good service, the Croatian guides must be punctual, while meeting, receiving and seeing guests off.

Tourist environment

Favorable natural and human environment of Croatia

Croatia is blessed with a mild climate, warm in winter and pleasant in summer. It is sunny, not windy, thus very agreeable. It is a virgin land, with blue sky, fresh air, big trees, and an unpolluted environment. It is very safe in Croatia. You don't have to worry about the safety of food, air, property, or your personal life. Croatian people are very kind, warmhearted and friendly. They are quiet, refined and well-educated. Most of them can speak good English.

The prices are competitive and reasonable. Croatia joined the European Union in July 2013, but it has not joined the euro zone yet. When we do shopping in Germany, we have to multiply the price tag by 8. In Great Britain, multiply by 9. While in America, multiply by 7. However, the Croatian currency Kuna is almost the same as Chinese currency in exchange rate. I feel like I am just paying with RMB. The cost-performance ratio is rather high.

Adhering to sustainable tourism to protect the vulnerable environment

Many Chinese cities are shrouded in thick haze now. To take warning from it, sustainable tourism development is a must for Croatia. The bearing capacity of attractions in Croatia is very limited. We must be environmentally sensitive concerning the position-setting of Chinese tourists to Croatia, so as not to spoil the pure environment.

In my opinion, the Chinese tourist market of Croatia should be positioned as high-end customer sources, specifically, for those well-off and well-educated people who have already been to France, Italy, Germany and other major European countries and are seeking for specialized tourist products. They have strong consumption capacity, capable of bringing tourism income to Croatia. Meanwhile, as they are small in number, they do not pose huge pressure on the delicate environment. And the tourists must be reminded to protect the vulnerable environment. Take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints.

Weakness analysis

Spatial distance

Long distance between China and Croatia with no direct flight

Croatia is far away from China, while Chinese people prefer to go to nearer and cheaper resorts like Thailand, the Philippines, Bali Island in Indonesia, even the Maldives. There is no direct flight between China and Croatia. To go to Zagreb from Shanghai, I usually transit in Istanbul, or Moscow, or Doha, or Frankfurt, which is tiring, troublesome and time-consuming. We can compare Croatia with Turkey. Geographically speaking, Istanbul is just a little closer to China than Zagreb. However, every year Turkey attracts many more Chinese tourists than Croatia. And one of the major reasons might be the opening of direct flight between China and Turkey, which greatly facilitates the exchange of tourists.

Cooperating with Chinese airlines and open direct flight between China and Croatia

Croatian airlines may strengthen cooperation with relevant civil aviation enterprises in China, and endeavor to open a direct flight between China and Croatia. At the beginning, there may not be enough passengers, but the word-of-mouth advertising will definitely bring lots of Chinese people to Croatia, thus ensuring the economic profits of airlines while benefiting the Chinese tourists to Croatia.

Visa formalities

Croatia not a Schengen state yet and inconvenience for Chinese people to go through visa formalities

Croatia is not a Schengen state yet, which is most obstructive. To enter Croatia, Chinese people have to go through visa formalities, which is rather complicated and inefficient. However, according to the regulations

on the website of the Croatian Embassy in Beijing, "All visitors who are holders of valid Schengen documents, as well as of the national visas and residence permits of Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Romania do not require an additional (Croatian) visa to enter Croatia" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia 2017). So, for those Chinese tourists who originally plan to apply for Schengen visas, they can visit Croatia by the way, without an additional Croatian visa, which is somewhat encouraging.

Striving to become a Schengen state and simplifying or waiving visa formalities for Chinese people

Croatia joined the European Union on 1 July 2013. And it will, in due time, accede to the Schengen Convention and become a Schengen country, which can strongly facilitate the trip of Chinese tourists in Croatia and other Schengen states.

Easy, simple and flexible visa policies and regulations are strongly recommended. Thus, it is essential for Croatia to make great efforts to join the Schengen zone in the near future, and moreover, to grant Chinese tourists a visa waiver program or visa on arrival, thereby further simplifying or waiving visa formalities for Chinese people.

Payment mode

Croatia not in the euro zone yet and China UnionPay card still not accepted in Croatia

Croatia joined the European Union on 1 July 2013, but it has not joined the euro zone yet. The Croatian local currency is called Kuna, which is almost the same as Chinese RMB in exchange rate. The price level of consumer goods and services in Croatia is comparatively lower than that of euro zone countries. In addition, China UnionPay (China UnionPay 2017) card is still not accepted in Croatia. As a result, Chinese tourists usually have to first convert RMB to euro, then change euro into Kuna. If they haven't used up all of their cash, they will have to convert Kuna back to euro, which is somewhat troublesome, but not really disturbing. Anyway, the price is acceptable.

Looking forward to the opening of China UnionPay service in Croatia

Due to the continuous economic depression and high unemployment rate, Croatia is not in a rush to join the euro zone. We might as well wait and see. Meanwhile, China UnionPay is likely to open payment services in Croatia in the future, so that Chinese tourists can enjoy the convenience of paying with credit cards in Croatia. We may look forward to the opening of the China UnionPay service in Croatia.

Opportunity analysis

Tourism statistics

Continuous economic depression and significance of tourism industry in Croatia

In accordance with the 2015 Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Croatia, the annual gross domestic product of Croatia has been continuously decreasing, reflecting the on-going economic depression and recession in Croatia (See Table 1). Yet the gross domestic product per capita in 2014 still exceeds 10,000 euros, indicating that Croatia is rated as a developed country as before.

Table 1: Gross Domestic Product, Annual Calculation

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total population | 4 296 000 | 4 283 000 | 4 269 000 | 4 254 000 | 4 236 000 |
| Gross domestic product, market prices (unit: million euro) | 45 022 | 44 737 | 43 959 | 43 516 | 43 045 |
| Gross domestic product per capita (unit: euro) | 10 479 | 10 446 | 10 297 | 10 228 | 10 162 |
| Growth rates (unit: %) | -1,7 | -0,3 | -2,2 | -1,1 | -0,4 |

However, in the meantime, the total tourist arrivals have been steadily on the rise, reaching more than 13 million in 2014 (See Table 2). The number of foreign tourists is more than 10 times that of domestic tourists in 2014. The total number of tourists is 3 times as many as its population in 2014. And the percentage of receipts from the tourism industry accounted for 17.2% of total GDP in 2014 and up to 18.1% in 2015 (See Table 3). Therefore, the tourism industry is really crucial and significant in Croatia, especially inbound tourism.

Table 2: Tourist Arrivals by Country of Residence

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total | 10 604 000 | 11 456 000 | 11 835 000 | 12 434 000 | 13 128 000 |
| Domestic tourists | 1 493 000 | 1 529 000 | 1 466 000 | 1 485 000 | 1 505 000 |
| Foreign tourists | 9 111 000 | 9 927 000 | 10 369 000 | 10 948 000 | 11 623 000 |
| Germany | 1 525 000 | 1 661 000 | 1 853 000 | 1 932 000 | 1 989 000 |
| Slovenia | 1 017 000 | 1 100 000 | 1 054 000 | 1 067 000 | 1 102 000 |
| Italy | 1 018 000 | 1 150 000 | 1 051 000 | 1 017 000 | 1 061 000 |
| Austria | 810 000 | 893 000 | 946 000 | 968 000 | 1 019 000 |
| Czech Republic | 606 000 | 638 000 | 647 000 | 652 000 | 661 000 |
| Poland | 454 000 | 495 000 | 544 000 | 636 000 | 630 000 |
| France | 388 000 | 395 000 | 418 000 | 449 000 | 441 000 |
| United Kingdom | 241 000 | 256 000 | 307 000 | 389 000 | 429 000 |
| USA | 133 000 | 151 000 | 174 000 | 220 000 | 256 000 |
| Korea, Republic of | 18 000 | 33 000 | 47 000 | 74 000 | 264 000 |
| Japan | 147 000 | 132 000 | 155 000 | 159 000 | 177 000 |
| China | 13 000 | 22 000 | 43 000 | 42 000 | 61 000 |

Source: Croatian State Bureau of Statistics 2015.

Table 3: Travel related revenues

| | 2014 | 2015 (Preliminary data) |
|---|---------|-------------------------|
| GDP (in million euro) | 43 060 | 43 845 |
| Travel related revenues (in million euro) | 7 402.3 | 7 949.8 |
| Share of tourism in overall economy in % | 17.2 | 18.1 |

Source: Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia 2016.

In 2014, the most numerous foreign tourist arrivals come from Germany, Slovenia, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland. These countries are mostly located in Europe, close to or adjacent to Croatia. Distance is a critical element. There are less tourist arrivals from America and Asia. Although Chinese tourists are growing continually, the absolute figure is far from satisfactory. In 2014, the total Chinese tourist arrivals in Croatia were estimated at 61 000, accounting for just 0.46% of total tourists that year. By contrast, Japanese tourist arrivals were 177 000. And tourist arrivals of South Korea increased drastically in 2014 and amounted to 264 000, outnumbering Japanese tourists for the first time.

Attaching much importance to the exploration of potential Chinese tourist source market

The State Council of China issued a significant document "On Speeding up the Development of Tourism" in 2009. For the first time tourism was positioned as the strategic pillar industry of China. It is quite a favourable policy.

China is a sizable customer market, with a population of 1.4 billion people. According to the "Annual Report of the Development of China's Outbound Tourism in 2016" (China Association of Travel Services 2016), China's outbound tourists reached 117 million person times in 2015. In terms of absolute number, China has become the world's largest outbound tourism market.

China is a huge strategic tourist source market to be explored and cultivated. However, the current situation of Chinese group tourists and

individual tourists in Croatia is not inspiring.

The Republic of Croatia and the People's Republic of China signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Tourism of Croatia and the State Tourism Administration of China in 2003. As a result, Croatia was listed as a tourist destination country for Chinese citizens going abroad at their own expense in 2003.

At present, the sightseeing or holiday trip to Croatia takes the form of group tourism, organized only by certified travel agencies. It is not open for individual tourism yet. China has made a list of agencies that are certified to organize group tourist travel, and there is a list of Croatian agencies that are certified to receive Chinese tourist groups in Croatia.

However, the above stated rule does not apply to tourist agencies in Taiwan. They can cooperate with any Croatian agency. I do find some Taiwanese in Croatia.

Limea Travel (Limea Travel Zagreb D.O. 2017) is the only local Chinese travel agency in Croatia, focusing on sightseeing trips in Eastern Europe, mainly Croatia and Hungary. Its classic 8-day itinerary in Croatia includes Zagreb, Pula, Poreč, Opatija, Plitvička jezera, Zadar, Trogir, Split and Dubrovnik.

The individual Chinese tourists are mainly those who are living, studying, working, visiting relatives or friends in Croatia or in Europe. Some are backpackers. They usually travel to the surrounding countries, such as Italy, Austria, Hungary, and then they would like to visit Croatia. Therefore, they visit Croatia just by the way, not specially and deliberately.

Croatia is usually not included in the itineraries of renowned Chinese travel agencies in Europe, such as the Panda of Germany, Mandarin Voyages of France, Omega and Wang Dynasty of Great Britain.

Consequently, much importance should be attached to the exploration of potential Chinese tourist source market.

Threat analysis

Brand popularity

Chinese people knowing very little about Croatia

Chinese people know very little about Croatia, or even misunderstand Croatia. In their mind, Croatia has just been separated from former Yugoslavia after the War of Independence, and is now still in chaos, and thus somewhat turbulent and unsafe. However, those who have been to Croatia all like it, with no exception. Hence, above all, we must let Chinese people know that there is a beautiful country called Croatia. Croatia boasts 15 UNESCO intangible cultural heritages, 8 UNESCO cultural heritage sites, and 2 UNESCO natural heritages, which is fantastic and can be a selling point indeed. It is peaceful and picturesque. And it is very safe. The importance of marketing and promotion, therefore, can never be overstressed.

Positioning accurately and doing much promotion and publicity in China

Obsessed and enlightened by the positioning theory of Jack Trout (Wikipedia 2017), one of the founders and pioneers of positioning theory, I think the positioning of tourism in Croatia must be rather unique, characteristic and differentiated. However, the tourist resources of Croatia tend to be rich and diversified. How to ingeniously package Croatian tourism? Here I suggest one simple, direct and easily understandable marketing slogan, "the most popular resort of Europeans", which can cater to the group psychology of Chinese consumers.

Besides, I'd like to recommend differentiated activities for Croatia to intensify tourism promotion and publicity in China.

The Croatian National Tourist Board³ may establish its representative and branch office in China, and set up an official Chinese website, making it

3 More information is available at <http://business.croatia.hr/en-GB/Croatian-national-tourist-board/Representative-and-branch-offices>

easier for Chinese tourists to acquire updated tourism information about Croatia.

Traditional print media is direct and practical. More brochures, pamphlets, picture albums, and other promotional literature in both English and Chinese should be placed in tourism information centers and travel agencies both in China and Europe.

I toured all over Croatia independently, with the help of a book, "Croatia, secret garden of Europe (Hrvatska, tajni vrt Europe)", written by Mr. Xu Huili. It is a helpful and informative book for Chinese self-service tourists in Croatia. The tourism bureau concerned in China may have it published in China and cooperate with the author to arrange a book launch to publicize Croatia to more Chinese people.

The publicity of TV programs is most intense. The Croatian National Tourist Board may finance a reputable TV station in China to come to Croatia to shoot scenic films, collaborating with well-known Chinese film directors to shoot movies in Croatia. Besides, cooperate with Chinese celebrities, film stars, sports stars and talents, inviting them to hold weddings or other events in Croatia, thus well popularizing Croatian local conditions and customs. In addition, work on special television programs together with Chinese counterparts. For example, the renowned engineer and inventor Nikola Tesla was born in Smiljan, Croatia. And the famous merchant and traveler Marco Polo was born in Korčula, Croatia. Both can be incorporated into scientific and educational programs and documentaries, thus broadening the audience. If possible, provide scenic films for Chinese TV stations, have video clips transmitted in China, and broadcast TV commercials in China.

Promotion on the internet cannot be underestimated either. Post the promotional materials and tourism advertisements onto the destination exploration section of Chinese tourism websites, such as www.ctrip.com, www.tuniu.com, www.lvmama.com, www.springtour.com, etc.

Furthermore, try to attract big Chinese companies to reward their employees with a trip to Croatia. Being a high-end product, the incentive tour is most lucrative and promising.

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