

Kvarner Tourist Board
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Maritime heritage as tourism potential – Kvarner Maritime Heritage

Abstract

Kvarner has a long-standing and profound connection with the sea, which has shaped its identity, culture, and economy. To preserve and promote its maritime heritage, the Kvarner Tourist Board launched the *Kvarner Maritime Heritage* brand in 2019. This branding initiative enabled the systematic promotion of maritime heritage through cultural and tourism-related products, strengthening Kvarner's position as a cultural tourism destination. Significant contributions to the development of the brand came from EU-funded projects such as *Mala Barka*, *Mala Barka 2*, and *Arca Adriatica*.

Notably, the successful collaboration between the Kvarner Tourist Board and the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, lead partner in the aforementioned projects, as well as with the Maritime and History Museum of the Croatian Littoral in Rijeka, played a key role. Additionally, the Coordination of Associations for the Preservation of Maritime, Fishing and Shipbuilding Heritage of Kvarner and Istria – *Traditional Sails of Kvarner and Istria*, has significantly contributed to a systematic approach to the preservation and revitalization of Kvarner's maritime heritage.

The brand encompasses a network of 90 interpretive signs, 24 thematic itineraries, 16 restored traditional boats, 5 major maritime events, and 4 interpretation centers. These activities promote maritime heritage through education, workshops, entertainment, and interactive content, tailored to a broad audience, including younger generations.

The brand has also gained international recognition and today serves as a successful model of integrating tradition, tourism, and the local community in the creation of an authentic and sustainable cultural product.

Keywords: Kvarner Maritime Heritage, Kvarner, Kvarner Tourist Board, maritime heritage, cultural tourism, destination branding

1. Introduction

Kvarner has always been strongly connected to the sea, which has shaped the life, identity and culture of the local population. Its rich maritime heritage, based on the tradition of shipbuilding, fishing and seafaring, today represents one of the key characteristics of the region. This autochthonous maritime tradition holds immense cultural value and represents exceptional tourism potential.

Recognizing the need for systematic valorization and promotion of this exceptional heritage, the Kvarner Tourist Board, in cooperation with partners, including Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, the Maritime and History Museum of the

Croatian Littoral in Rijeka, the Coordination of Associations for the Preservation of the Maritime, Fishing and Shipbuilding Heritage of Kvarner and Istria – Traditional Sails of Kvarner and Istria, as well as numerous individuals and associations that have implemented projects dedicated to the preservation and revitalization of maritime heritage, developed the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand in 2019. This unique brand unites and interprets the attractions of Kvarner's maritime heritage.

2. Branding as a tool for preserving and promoting maritime heritage

Branding is the process of creating a distinct and recognizable identity for a product, service or destination. In tourism, branding plays a key role in emphasizing the unique characteristics of a destination, enhancing its visibility and attracting target audience.

The Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand supports the systematic promotion of maritime heritage, while also fostering the development of cultural and tourism products based on local traditions. By highlighting the distinctive features of Kvarner's maritime heritage, the brand makes this resource accessible to both domestic and international visitors. At the same time, it contributes to the long-term positioning of Kvarner as a significant destination for cultural tourism.

3. Brand development and the role of EU projects

The systematic approach to the tourist valorization and promotion of maritime heritage was intensified through the EU projects *Mala Barka*, *Mala Barka 2* and *Arca Adriatica*. These projects provided essential knowledge, fostered collaboration with partners from both Croatia and abroad, and offered financial support for the protection, restoration and interpretation of maritime heritage. Particular recognition should be given to the successful cooperation with Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, the lead partner in these projects, and the Maritime and History Museum of the Croatian Littoral Rijeka, which played a key role as a project partner. Equally important was the contribution of the Coordination of Associations for the Preservation of Maritime, Fishing and Shipbuilding Heritage of Kvarner and Istria – Traditional Sails of Kvarner and Istria, which significantly advanced the systematic approach to the preservation and revitalization of maritime heritage in Kvarner. In addition, the dedication and work of numerous individuals and associations to various maritime heritage projects over the years deserve sincere appreciation.

A major step forward in branding was made as part of the EU-funded project *Arca Adriatica*, when the Kvarner Tourist Board, in cooperation with the aforementioned partners, developed the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand, an extension of the existing Kvarner Culture brand. This new brand enabled the systematic identification, promotion and interpretation of Kvarner's maritime heritage, with the goal of creating a distinctive tourism product based on tradition, local identity and sustainability.

As a result of years of dedicated work and investment, the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand today encompasses a wide range of contents and activities, contributing in an engaging and effective way to the preservation and promotion of the Kvarner maritime heritage.

The logo design of the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand was intentionally developed to align with the existing visual identity of the Kvarner Tourist Board, ensuring visual consistency and recognisability within the broader Kvarner Culture brand.

The logo is not only a symbol of recognition, but serves also as a communication tool, reflecting the core values of the brand: authenticity, cultural uniqueness, strong connection to the sea and a deep sense of belonging to the region. Its clean and simple design allows for easy application in a variety of contexts – from interpretive boards and promotional materials, to digital platforms.

Logo:



4. Key elements of Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand

The Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand encompasses a variety of segments and attractions that together form a rich and diverse network of cultural and tourism attractions. The most prominent elements marked with the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand include:

- 90 interpretive boards and signs located across the county's coastal destinations,
- 24 maritime heritage itineraries,
- 16 restored traditional Kvarner boats,
- 5 major maritime events in Rijeka, Mošćenička Draga, Krk, Crikvenica and Nerezine/Mali Lošinj,
- 4 maritime heritage interpretation centers situated in Mošćenička Draga, Krk, Malinska and Mali Lošinj (lugger *Nerezinac*).

5. Unique markings of maritime heritage

Informative and educational signs (markings) have been installed at 90 locations across Kvarner, grouped into three types and eight thematic categories. Each sign contains a QR code linking to the Virtual Museum of Maritime Heritage, which presents the region's heritage in a modern and interactive format, available in five languages (Croatian, English, Italian, German and Slovenian). These signs also served as the foundation for the creation of 24 maritime heritage itineraries.

6. Maritime heritage itineraries

Based on the established markings, 24 thematic itineraries have been created. The itineraries vary in duration (ranging from one day to one week) and thematic focus (cultural routes, event-based routes, educational routes, etc.), catering to different interests and visitor profiles. By following these itineraries, visitors can explore authentic coastal towns, historic ports, shipyards, museums and interpretation centers, while also encountering people who continue to preserve the tradition of life by the sea. Beyond their touristic appeal, the itineraries are also educational, offering guests the opportunity to engage directly with the maritime identity of the region and to discover the traditional maritime skills and customs that have shaped the history of Kvarner.

7. Restored traditional boats

Restored traditional boats are undoubtedly among the most captivating elements of the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand. As part of EU-funded projects, sixteen traditional boats, including *pasara*, *guc*, *gajeta*, and *leut*, have been restored in Kvarner. These boats now serve as a kind of open-air museum, while remaining actively involved in various events, such as regattas, thematic festivals, and educational workshops for children and youth. Through the restored traditional boats, the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand fulfils one of its key missions: not only to preserve, but to revitalize maritime heritage. By integrating tradition into modern cultural and tourist experiences, the brand ensures this legacy is passed on to new generations and recognized as a valuable and engaging tourist attraction.

8. Maritime manifestations

Alongside the restored traditional boats, maritime events are among the most striking attractions of the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand. These events represent a combination of tradition, local identity, cultural heritage and an authentic tourist experience. Their importance is paramount, as their programs actively promote and preserve traditional wooden boat sailing, shipbuilding, maritime and fishing skills, as well as the stories and customs that have shaped the identity of Kvarner.

The brand highlights five key maritime events, held annually in various parts of Kvarner. Each event, in its own unique way, has become a symbol of how the local community and visitors are brought together through a shared connection to Kvarner's maritime heritage.

8.1. Kvarner Festival of the Sea and Maritime Tradition – FIUMARE

The Kvarner Festival of the Sea and Maritime Tradition – FIUMARE takes place in Rijeka at the end of May and the beginning of June. It serves as a kind of time machine, transporting the city back to an era when the sea was central to daily life.

Visitors can admire traditional wooden sailing boats displayed along the Korzo, participate in workshops on seafaring and fishing skills, attend educational lectures, experience historical reenactments, taste traditional dishes and enjoy a variety of entertainment programs.

Today, the FIUMARE Festival is more than just an event – it has become a cultural hub that brings together stakeholders from the fields of culture, tourism, education and art.

8.2. Festival and regatta of traditional sailing boats *Mala Barka – Story of the Sea*

In July, MALA BARKA – Story of the Sea (Small Boat Festival and Regatta of Traditional Sailing Boats) festival takes place in Mošćenička Draga. This three-day event combines the past and the present, displaying traditional boats, maritime culture and contemporary approaches to heritage interpretation.

The highlight of the event is the traditional boat regatta, typically featuring around thirty boats. In addition to the regatta, the festival offers a range of activities, including workshops on traditional shipbuilding, fishing and seafaring skills, exhibitions with maritime motifs, musical and stage performances and children's workshops. Through educational and entertaining content, the event brings the values of maritime culture closer to the wider public and strengthens awareness of the value of local identity.

8.3. Krk Sails

In August, the town of Krk becomes the focal point of maritime festivities during the *Krk Sails* event. This multi-day celebration of maritime culture features a rich program that includes regattas, exhibitions, lectures, workshops, as well as culinary and musical events. A highlight of the festival is the traditional sailing boat regatta, held annually on August 15, beginning precisely at noon, marked by the final chime of the bells of Krk Cathedral. *Krk Sails* holds special significance as the first and oldest regatta of traditional vessels in this part of the Adriatic.

8.4. Fisherman's week

For over 50 years, the transition from August to September in Crikvenica has been reserved for a special event – Fisherman's Week. The event brings together sea lovers, fishing enthusiasts and tradition admirers through a variety of events – from cultural and entertainment programs, regattas, themed workshops, to unmissable culinary experiences. A special emphasis is placed on the eno-gastronomic offer, where visitors can enjoy a variety of seafood delicacies, prepared according to traditional local recipes.

8.5. LOSINAVA – Lošinj sails around the world

In September, the island of Lošinj hosts *Losinava*, a festival dedicated to the island's rich maritime and shipbuilding heritage.

The festival features traditional boat regattas, shipbuilding and maritime workshops, exhibitions and educational activities. Through a series of themed events, the island's glorious past is brought to life, while also delivering a powerful message to younger generations about the importance of preserving its maritime heritage.

All five events are connected by the collaboration and engagement of local communities, associations, tourism professionals and heritage experts. Moreover, visitors are not just spectators, they are active participants in workshops, regattas and exhibitions, which creates a genuine experience, based on authenticity and tradition. Thanks to such activities, the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand is more than just a tourism product – it is a living symbol of identity and an innovative approach to interpreting the rich maritime heritage.

9. Interpretation centers

Four interpretation centers play an important role in preserving and presenting the maritime heritage of Kvarner, located in Krk, Malinska, Mošćenička Draga and the Lošinj lugger Nerezinac.

Each of them provides a unique insight into the maritime past of the local area, using modern interpretation tools that make the heritage interesting to a wider audience. The interpretation centers differ in concept and content, but they have a common goal – to preserve and interpret Kvarner's maritime heritage in an educational and authentic way.

As part of the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand, they offer a space for dialogue, learning and recognition of maritime heritage as an important cultural heritage and way of life.

10. International recognition

The quality and innovation of the Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand have been recognized at the international level. In 2022, the European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN) named the brand the best thematic product of sustainable cultural tourism in Europe. The following year, it received the prestigious international BIG SEE Award in the category “Creative stories and destination identity as a unique experience”. These international awards confirm Kvarner’s position as the leader in innovative approaches to promoting cultural tourism, based on authentic identity and sustainability.

11. Conclusion

The Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand is a compelling example of how cultural heritage can be successfully transformed into a modern, engaging and sustainable tourism product. At the same time, the brand contributes to the preservation of valuable maritime heritage and the strengthening the identity of the destination, promoting development, education and visibility.

Through the synergy of the local community, especially individuals and associations involved in maritime heritage preservation projects, alongside the tourism sector and partner institutions, this brand inspires, educates and connects the past with the future, the sea with its people and tradition with innovation.



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