CROATIAN LIGHTHOUSES – A NEW TOURIST ATTRACTION OF THE ADRIATIC

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ABSTRACT. Out of the fifty lighthouses erected on dangerous promontories and cliffs of the Adriatic coast, many have remained neglected, while some of them have been granted a new life when they were renovated into a unique place to stay. Due to the high demand for spending summer holidays in these beautiful stone buildings, one has to wait even for several years. The theme of this work, Croatian lighthouses as a place for spending holidays are a good example of how to meet the tourists' high demands by creating imaginative offers and to promote maritime tourism from an entirely different angle by offering guests an experience of their own deserted island.

Key words: island, lighthouse, Robinson Crusoe style tourism, Croatia

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, lighthouses were necessary for the safe navigation through the Adriatic because of its exceptionally indented coastline. Lighthouses were built in the early 19th century during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and soon after they became the biggest and most important facilities of signalling at the sea. In addition to lighting devices, lighthouses also included a comfortable living space for lighthouse keepers and their families. However, because of the modernization and automation of lighting devices, lighthouses have been declared the monuments of the highest category, and at the beginning of this decade an extremely imaginative idea to turn their interiors into unique apartments for tourists has come up. This was the beginning of a new form of adventure tourism, renting a lighthouse, which is original enough even for the most demanding tourists, and it delights more and more visitors a year after a year.

2. WHAT IS ROBINSON CRUSOE TYPE OF HOLIDAY?

Indented Adriatic coast, as well as numerous islands and islets, have enabled the development of specific type of tourism called Robinson Crusoe style tourism. 'Robinson Crusoe style tourism is a new form of tourism, which offers living and sleeping outside of the construction areas or outside of populated areas, in buildings without the infrastructure and amenities of civilization and the natural shelters where people can stay.'³⁵

This type of holiday was named after the famous character from the novel by Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe.

The reason for this is the fact that a Robinson Crusoe type of the house is located in remote area by the sea in a beautiful bay where one can only hear the sounds of nature, crickets singing, and waves and feel the scent of Mediterranean herbs seething under the summer sun. Being alone on a desert island is a synonym for a perfect vacation, thus Robinson and holiday connected and the new name for this unique type of tourism was created. These houses have been spontaneously formed on the Adriatic coast. In the past people built bunjas, stone houses without binding material, the ruins of which can still be found and which served as a shelter from the rain and storms to shepherds and their livestock. Fishermen and farmers eventually began to build smaller, more modest houses also for shelter and short

³⁵ Bunja, Đ. Organizacija poslovanja u hotelijerstvu i turizmu. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2008

stay. Since an unspoiled nature is a rare sight and fast everyday life makes a man search for peace and quiet, the potential and value of Robinson house, which became one of the most wanted types of accommodation, was recognized.

3. CROATIAN LIGHTHOUSES – A NEW TOURIST ATTRACTION OF THE ADRIATIC

‘Due to an extreme indentation, cruising the Croatian Adriatic coast was both easy and dangerous in the past, depending on weather conditions. During the favourable weather and daylight, many islands, islets and reefs weren’t a problem for experienced sailors when sailing, but during bad weather conditions and at night the land obstacles posed a problem in navigation and they represented danger. Even though before the lighthouses appeared in the ancient time, there had been a ‘guidance system’, which had included the burning torch on the towers at the harbour entrance, lighthouses in the modern sense of the word were built from the early 19th century when Austro-Hungarian, wanting to develop as powerful navy, raises an initial network of lighthouses which was being equipped with new lighting devices and technically modernized during the interwar and socialist Yugoslavia, and independent Croatia. The majority of Croatian lighthouses, especially those remote ones, offshore islands, besides lighting devices, within a few metres of thick walls would involve a few hundred square metres of space designed for lighthouse keeper and his family’s stay. Due to automation of lighting devices, there are less lighthouse keepers, and the idea to turn this space into holiday apartment for tourists has come up.’³⁶ The Adriatic coast boasts an enviable

figure 48 lighthouses, 13 of which can be rented. Some lighthouses do still have keepers while some are completely deserted and reserved only for the fans of Robinson Crusoe style holidays. Lighthouse apartments can accommodate two to six people, who can enjoy fishing, diving or rent a boat or a small craft besides enjoying the unique accommodation. Except in the summer, it is possible to stay in the lighthouses Savudrija, Struga and Veli Rat during the winter and have a completely new experience.

“On the largest Croatian peninsula, wooded Istria, there are four lighthouses for rent. Savudrija and Cape Zub are perfect choice for those who want to enjoy the lighthouse without being too far away from civilization as cities Umag and Poreč are both near. On the other side there are Porer and Sveti Ivan which are the only facilities on the small islands of the same name and one can reach them only by boat. The lighthouse Veli Rat is situated on Dugi Otok, which belongs to the Zadar archipelago. Legend has it that thousands of eggs were used in building it in order to make it better resistant to wind and salt. Being located close to several smaller hamlets, it is not very isolated but its guests have the opportunity to visit nature park Telašćica, which is also on the island, and the Kornati National Park, which is nearby. Near Kornati, there is a small island Prišnjak, where lighthouse of the same name is the only facility and only inhabitants are harmless endemic rabbit and lizard species. The island is connected to Murter island by boat, and it is adorned with dry stone walls, a small waterfront, a beautiful stone terrace, and pine trees and fig trees. Only a 5 minute boat ride away from the centre of the Vis island, there is the Host islet whose submarine is a valuable archaeological site. Islet is adorned only with Host lighthouse and a

³⁶ Šerić, N. Kamena svjetla, Priče i legende o Jadranskimsvjetionicima, o mjestima na kojima su izgrađeni i njihovom podmorju. Split: Marjan tisak, 2004.

beach, and it offers a unique view of Vis on one side and the sunset and sunrise on the other. On the Lastovo island, which is the largest island in Lastovo archipelago that includes around fifty islets, lighthouse Struga is situated and it adorns a cape with the same name and offers a breathtaking view of the sea to its visitors and thus creates the impression of deserted island, although there are several small hamlets. On the other side there are lighthouses Sveti Petar and Grebeni which offer a completely different experience.

They are situated near the beautiful Makarska and the world famous city of Dubrovnik, and they offer their guests an original accommodation in the vicinity of large cities. Lighthouses that are isolated and good choice for Robinson Crusoe style holidays are Sušac and Pločica, both situated on a deserted and uninhabited island where the only object is a lighthouse.”³⁷ However, a specially isolated lighthouse is Palagruža, which is located at the very top of the island, 90 metres above the sea level. ‘Island Palagruža is the most remote Croatian island and it is in the centre of the Adriatic Sea, between Italian and Croatian coasts, and it represents a nature reserve with flora and fauna species and is an archaeological site.’³⁸ Without any contact with civilization, the island from which the view extends only to the endless horizon, the stay at the lighthouse Palagruža is genuinely special.

4. PALARUŽA LIGHTHOUSE – THE BEST LIGHTHOUSE FOR HOLIDAY

Out of all 13 lighthouses involved in tourism activities, lighthouse on the Palagruža island, the most remote Croatian island, equally distant from Lastovo island in the northeast and the Italian Garangano

peninsula in the south, certainly deserves a lot of attention. In fact, if we assume that one of the crucial motives for this Robinson tourism, the remoteness, insularity and isolation, are of the major importance, Paladruža is definitely a destination that should not be missed. Nowhere on the Adriatic can one experience the aforementioned feeling such as on Palagruža, an islet around 50 kilometres away from the nearest civilization which is usually not even seen on the horizon.

‘The foundations and ground floor of the building were built out of the stone from Palagruža while the rest of the building was built out of Brač stone. The total surface of the building (ground floor and first floor) has approximately 400m². There are two holiday apartments intended for renting, both having around 50m², two double bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom with toilet. Apartments also have heating system so it is possible to stay during the winter as well. It is possible to go down from the lighthouse to the shores of Palagruža by two trails that lead to Stare Vlake, a sandy beach on the north, and to Veli Žal on the south side of the island.’³⁹

CONCLUSION

Once “islands of solitude”, the Adriatic lighthouses have been recently successfully involved in the tourist offer giving tourists a completely different experience of the Adriatic Sea and, at the same time, strengthening the old slogan of the Croatian National Tourist board ‘Croatia – The Mediterranean as it once was’. Demands, especially from Austrian, Italian and German tourists, for renting the lighthouse suits are increasing and it should be pointed out that the interest is high outside the bathing season as well, which confirms that the important motive of the tourist stay in lighthouses is to experience

³⁷ www.croatia.info

³⁸ www.geografija.hr

³⁹ www.adriatica.net

the life on the ‘desert island’, i. e. to feel like a lighthouse keeper.

The concept of making the holiday apartments in lighthouses is in any case a good example of development of Croatian tourism, which greatly contributes its identity in relation to the competition, other Mediterranean countries. In fact, one can rarely see the lighthouses included in the tourist offer as accommodation and giving tourist a unique experience that they provide.

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