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## Tourism Development in Serbia

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How Serbia plans to emerge onto the world stage.

Serbia has received a number of accolades, including a Best Value for Money for Holiday Packages nod from the Economic Intelligence Unit. The city of Belgrade has also scooped some top prizes, being named the "City of Cool" by the Sunday Times and the "City of the Future" by the

Financial Times - both of which will go a long way in branding the country's tourism product. However, as with any emerging destination, a question of competitiveness for quality and price emerges. The Serbia Tourism Organisation has implemented a multi-faceted approach to investing in its human capital to raise the standards of service quality as well as facilitating an environment for investment in tourism infrastructure.

Speaking at the Serbia Stand at the **32nd annual ITF** in Belgrade, Ms Gordana Plamenac, the director of the Serbia Tourist Office (STO), said that for "...travel agents, hotels, tour operators - pricing policy has already been determined but government is working to provide added value and for travellers such as offering a child free stay". The STO will be working with stakeholders to created added value for tourists, and this will go along way towards increasing Serbia's competitiveness with other destinations such as Croatia and Bulgaria. Ms. Plamenac added "...we are trying to arrange with travel agents and hotels to give the added value. Pricing policy has already been determined but what we are trying to teach them and make them work in these terms is give an added value".

With Serbia pushing its development along the Danube, largely through its rural homes and small hotels, the STO has made it a priority to invest in its human capital; including hosting local workshops and seminars to enhance service quality. The STO has also leveraged its relationships to host journalists and tour operators from abroad to do site inspections, however a standardisation of quality is still lacking. The STO is making significant steps to address this issue, including setting up national associations for sectors such as rural hotels and wine producers in the attempt to harmonise the hospitality offering. Ms. Plamenac explained that: "The ministry of economy had made a legal recommendation setting the framework for becoming a member".

STO has also reached out to IFH WorldWide, a company focused on delivering performance benchmarking and training programmes to its international clients. IFH Worldwide, which recognised a need for benchmarking in Serbia, made the decision two years ago to open an office in Belgrade due to the emergence of destinations such as Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia. The need to invest the human capital extends beyond service quality and into operational and business management of hospitality organisations. Ms. Marija Bijelic explained that they "...have been negotiating with [The tourist organization of Serbia] and with the Chamber of Commerce. IFH has the know how as we have offices all over the world and what is delivered in the training is brand new, revenue management, yield management. People still need to open their minds towards the importance of budgeting for example and that is also a benchmark for them."

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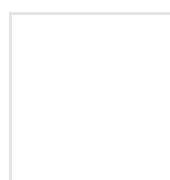
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### The Danube as a vehicle for development

To facilitate tourism development along the Danube, the Danube Competence Centre was established to develop cooperation among the countries which share the Danube River. Implementing regional marketing partnerships to promote tourism along the Danube - including in the cycling and adventure tourism sectors - Serbia is working towards building relationships with more developed countries along the western part of the Danube. It is hoped such partnerships will attract foreign investment to the country. Cycling tourism, a low impact model for sustainable tourism development, is being pushed by Serbia and will be an important catalyst for regional cooperation through the creation of cycle routes, signage, and quality services along the Danube river. Over 3,500 cyclists rode the Danube cycling route through Serbia during 2009.

Serbia is moving the right direction to position itself as a cultural hub for tourism, and with a focus on quality and added value it will become an emerging destination for investment as travellers begin to venture out to new and undiscovered destinations. The [Open Skies Agreement](#) - which has seen numerous low cost carriers opening routes to Serbia - will put Serbia on the map for tour operators and travel agents. The expanding tourism infrastructure will see a doubling in the amount of 4/5 star hotels in Belgrade in a few years and tax policies have been put in place in certain municipalities to attract foreign investment for tourism development. The Serbia Tourism Organisation in cooperation with its major stakeholders have all the elements to make Serbia a unique and compelling destination.

Tags: [sustainable tourism](#), [serbia tourism marketing](#), [serbia tourism product development](#), [serbia tourist office](#)

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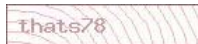
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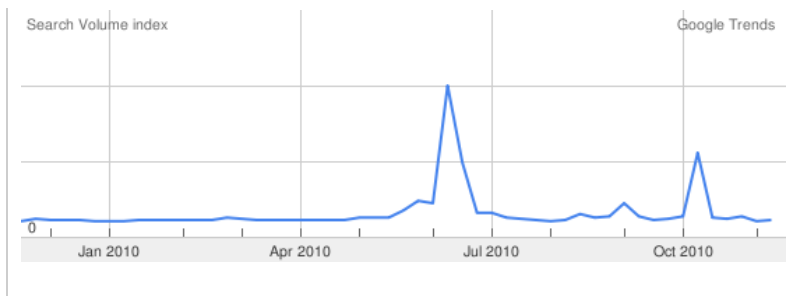


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