



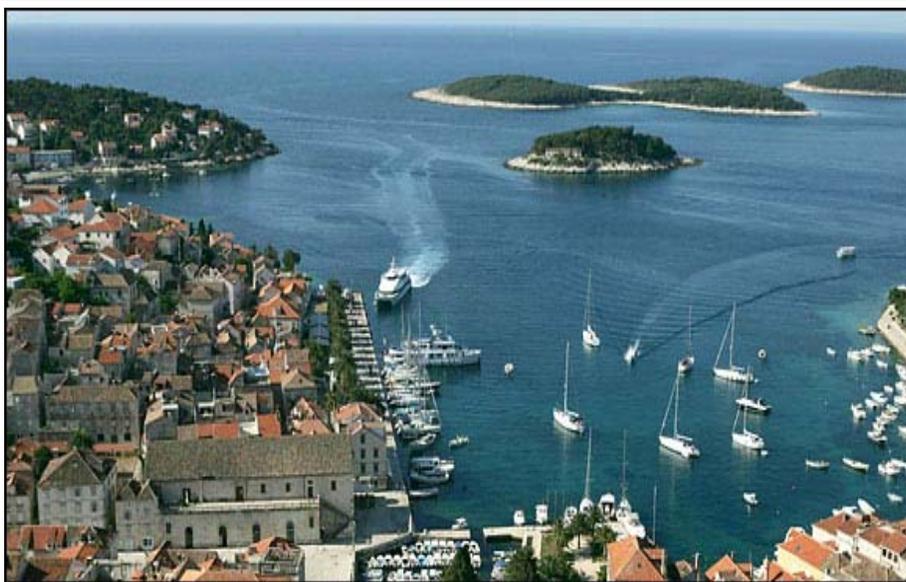
THIS WEEK...

- President Mesić Extends Best Wishes for Christmas, New Year and Hanukkah
- Prime Minister Sanader Issues Christmas and New Year Message to Croatian Citizens
- Prime Minister Sanader Comments on Government's Achievements
- UNHCR: Forty Percent of Serb Refugees Have Returned to Croatia
- Croatia in 2005
- Croatia in U.S. Media: The New York Times: Top 2005 Travel Article on Croatia
- Lonely Planet: Croatia Among Top 5 Destinations in 2006
- The Salt Lake Tribune: Tradition on Hold for Giriček
- News in Brief...

Croatia in 2005



The opening of EU accession negotiations was the main achievement of the Government of Prime Minister Ivo Sanader in 2005. Above, Prime Minister Sanader, pictured in June 2004, on the occasion of Croatia becoming a candidate for entrance into the EU. [Photo: www.htnet.hr] (Page 3)



In 2006, Croatia Top New Destination for Americans

At last, the U.S. tourist has discovered Croatia! According to USTOA and Lonely Planet, **Croatia** will be the **top new destination for Americans in 2006.**

Photo: Lavender-scented Hvar island in central Dalmatia has inspired poets for centuries with its pristine landscape and azure waters. [[Steve Dougherty / New York Times](#)]

(Page 4)

Croatian President Extends Best Wishes for Christmas, New Year and Hanukkah



Croatian President Stjepan Mesić extended his best wishes for the New Year to all citizens of Croatia. [Photo: [Večernji list](#)]

ZAGREB, Croatia, Dec. 24 – Croatian President Stjepan Mesić sent a message to Cardinal Josip Bozanić, the Archbishop of Zagreb and President of the Croatian Bishops' Conference, and to all the Catholic faithful in Croatia, extending his best wishes for Christmas. Mesić said that "social peace and justice, personal and social security, material and spiritual progress remain the values whose attainment requires the commitment of all. Mesić also offered his best wishes to all Christian believers celebrating Christmas according to the Gregorian calendar. "Let these holidays be an opportunity for us to revive the good in us by building our personal goals and wishes into the development and progress of the Republic of Croatia," the President said. The President also extended his best wishes to the Jewish community in Croatia for Hanukkah. Recalling the great contribution by members of the Jewish community to all areas of life in Croatia, Mesić expressed his wish that "the festival of Hannukkah would encourage the Jewish faithful to continue their fruitful commitment to social and interreligious dialogue, peace, understanding and progress." President Mesić also issued a New Year's message, in which he stressed that Croatia was saying goodbye to the year marked by the start of the country's EU membership. Wishing Croatian citizens all the best in 2006, President Mesić said that the key tasks before Croatia were the continuation of EU membership talks, the strengthening of stability and peace in the region, consistent implementation of international obligation, the strengthening of contacts with the world sp as to promote own economic and political interests, as well as creating conditions for a better life of Croatian citizens.

Prime Minister Sanader Issues Christmas and New Year Message to Croatian Citizens

ZAGREB, Croatia, Dec. 24 – Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader issued a Christmas and New Year message to all citizens of Croatia, wishing them a happy and successful 2006. Speaking of this year's achievements, Sanader said that the launch of Croatia's EU entry talks was a historic step in the completion of a national strategic project, which started with the establishment of an independent state, its preservation and liberation. By starting EU entry talks in 2005, Croatia has strengthened its international position and become a mature member of the international community of

countries and peoples, Sanader said. Croatia has entered a new period, which will be remembered as a period of progress and new possibilities, the Prime Minister said in his message. Croatia's European future will bring new times, it will bring welfare and prosperity to all Croatian citizens, he said. After we second conditions for Croatia to develop into a modern, democratic, stable and law-based European state, we must use opportunities before us to achieve accelerated economic development and better living standards, Sanader said wishing a happy New Year. He also offered his best wishes to the Jewish faithful on the occasion of Hanukkah.

Prime Minister Sanader Comments on Government's Achievement

ZAGREB, Croatia, Dec. 23 – **The payment of the state debt to pensioners and the launching of EU entry** are the two most important achievements of the Croatian government in the last two years, said Prime Minister Sanader. We have fulfilled some of the promises given two years ago, Sanader told reporters on the occasion of his cabinet's second anniversary. "The payment of the state debt to pensioners has been a major problem burdening the Croatian society for 13 years and only my government had to courage to start dealing with it," the Prime Minister said. Another big success is the start of Croatia's EU entry talks, Sanader said, adding that this goal had not been an easy one, particularly after March, when the accession talks were unjustly delayed. Sanader went on to say that his government had not done as much as it could in all areas, notably regarding employment and improvement of living standars. "However, we have fulfilled our main objectives," Sanader concluded.



UNHCR: Forty Percent of Serb Refugees Have Returned to Croatia

ZAGREB, December 27 - Almost 40 per cent of Serbs refugees from the 1991-95 period have returned to Croatia, according to the UNHCR. "According to our records, as of Nov. 30, 2005, 123,000 Serbs have returned," said UNHCR spokesman in Zagreb, Neven Crvenković. A total of 280,000 Serbs fled Croatia in the 1991-95 period. The Government of Prime Minister Ivo Sanader is taking great strides to enable the return of Serbs to Croatia. The Croatian government and the OSCE have embarked on a joint media campaign across Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro in the second half of 2005, in order to stimulate the return of Serb refugees. The President of Serbia and Montenegro, Svetozar Marović, assessed the latest step as "honest," and has himself pushed for the refugees' return to Croatia.

To access UNHCR Croatia Office web site, please go to:

<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/country?iso=hrv>

Croatia in 2005

ZAGREB, Croatia, Dec. 28 - **The opening of accession negotiations with the EU, the arrest of General Ante Gotovina, securing funds for the return of the debt to pensioners and linking Mediterranean and continental regions of Croatia with a modern four-lane highway** are among the accomplishments that have marked the work of the Government of Prime Minister Ivo Sanader in 2005.



Chief Prosecutor for ICTY Carla del Ponte (left) confirmed Croatia's full cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. [Photo: www.vip.hr]

On Oct. 4, 2005, the EU Council of Ministers gave Croatia the green light for the start of EU accession negotiations, following an announcement by ICTY prosecutor Carla del Ponte that Croatia was "**fully cooperating**" with the international criminal tribunal in the Hague. The chief prosecutor stated that the government was doing all in its power to locate General Gotovina, and its actions and efforts, that eventually led to his arrest on Dec. 7, on the Spanish Canary Islands, were crucial for the opening of negotiations with the EU. Prime Minister Ivo Sanader assessed the start of EU negotiations as the end of the first, difficult chapter of cementing Croatia's international position.



The return of debt to pensioners was one of the main domestic government accomplishments in 2005. [Photo: www.vip.hr]

A key domestic accomplishment occurred in the government's relations with pensioners, a relatively large group in Croatia's population. The government has managed to secure funds which will be used to pay off the debt, owed by the state, to this group.

Additionally, the government has continued judiciary and health reforms, and it has opened the project "**Hitro.hr**" in order to shorten the time future entrepreneurs need to open a business.



The opening of the **380-kilometer highway A-1**, linking the capital Zagreb in the north and the coastal city of Split, is heralded as a major accomplishment of the year. A decades-long dream has been realized, linking Mediterranean and continental parts of Croatia. Work has continued south of Split, on linking Split with Dubrovnik.



Prime Minister Sanader gestures at the opening ceremony in Split of the Zagreb – Split highway. The new four-line highway will bring enormous benefits to Croatia's tourism industry and economy in general. [Photo: www.htnet.hr]

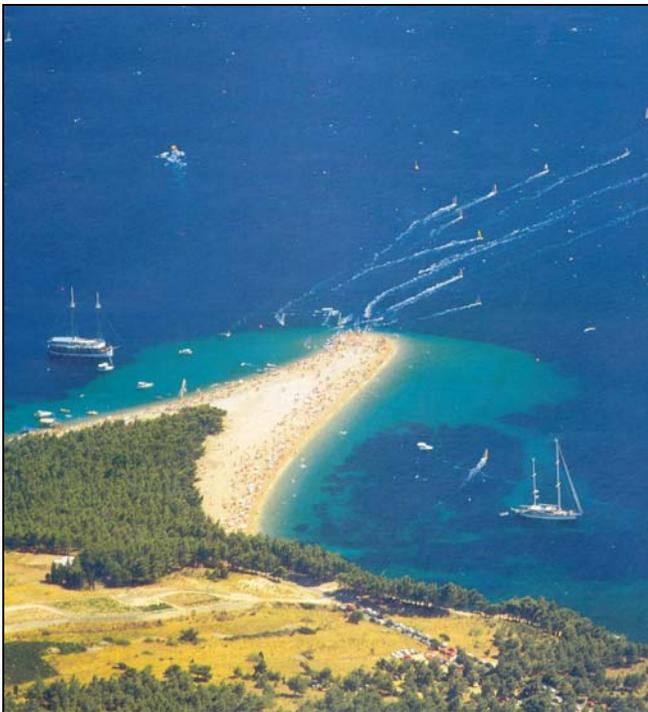
The highway not only better integrates the regions of Croatia, but also makes for more comfortable and quicker car travel for foreign tourists. When it comes to tourism, the highway, as part of the tourist infrastructure, could not have come at a better time. Namely, 2005 has been **a record tourist season** and, for the first time, there were 50 million lodgings, with forecasts for next year predicting a further increase of this number.

Finally, let us note that Croatia has impacted the world of sports in 2005, particularly skier Janica Kostelić, who won 3 gold medals in the World Skiing Championship, finishing second in the World Cup. In addition, Croatia won the Davis Cup in tennis, and finished second in the World Handball Championship. The Croatian National soccer team has qualified the 2006 World Cup, which will be held in Germany this summer.

The New York Times

New York Times: Top 2005 Travel Article on Croatia

NEW YORK, N.Y., Dec. 25 - A travel article about Croatia has topped the list of New York Times' 20 most popular travel articles of 2005. So say the staff, and readers, most of whom have experienced the magic of Croatia, others who were perhaps caught by surprise and wondered why the writer's, Steve Dougherty, recommendation to bring tissues if visiting the island-dotted Dalmatian coast. As those who have felt the calm of azure waters, the touch of an evening breeze hinting of lavender, the rugged beauty of the stone, or were dazed by a mid-afternoon song of the crickets know, it is because "you will cry when you see it," says Dougherty of the coast in his NY Times text "In Croatia, a New Riviera Beckons," the best travel article of 2005. Every place on the list, from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, to Paris and Dubai, is unique, and to us our homeland tops our own list. We are glad that the New York Times agrees, and we invite you to experience Croatia this summer for yourself, if you have not yet done so.



Zlatni Rat, on the island of Brač, is a wind surfer's paradise. [Photo: [Croatian National Tourist Board](#)]

For the complete New York Times list of the 20 top 2005 travel articles, visit:

<http://travel2.nytimes.com/2005/12/25/travel/25popular.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1135780282-oxAW/QN2t9x1w9OKFpu/6w>

To read Steve Dougherty's article "In Croatia, a New Riviera Beckons," please see:

<http://travel2.nytimes.com/2005/07/17/travel/17croatia.html?pagewanted=1&ei=5070&en=9e615b7e5221a864&ex=1135918800>

In 2006, Croatia Top New Destination for Americans



Croatia's central European capital city, Zagreb, is discovered by more and more U.S. tourists each year, thanks to its wide variety of attractions, events and a truly unique atmosphere. [Photo: [Croatian National Tourist Board](#)]

WASHINGTON, D.C., Dec. 29 - Croatia will be the top new foreign destination for U.S. tourists in 2006, according to the U.S. Tour Operators' Agency (USTOA). And Lonely Planet, the world's largest travel guide, appears to think the same. USTOA, whose assessment was reported by CNN and AOL, organizes trips for more than 10.5 million U.S. travelers each year. It has placed Croatia in front of China, the second most popular new destination for Americans next year, in the rankings. Lonely Planet, whose staffers have once again ranked Croatia among the top five tourist destinations for 2006, says that the country is particularly attractive to U.S. tourists because of its spectacular coastline and islands, its cultural, historical and gastronomic offerings and since it has a reliable tourist infrastructure, free of crowding that is often present in other Mediterranean countries. In 2005, 125,000 U.S. tourists visited Croatia, a 39% increase from 2004. Croatia's tourist industry has received much attention in the U.S. media in the past year, with coverage in National Geographic, Washington Post, New York Times, Budget Travel Magazine, NBC, E!, and other print and electronic media outlets.



To access the Lonely Planet web site for more information, please visit:

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/pressroom/news/press_release.cfm?press_release_id=202

For the CNN's article on the top 2006 destinations for U.S. tourists, go to:

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/TRAVEL/DESTINATIONS/12/28/travel.2006.outlook.ap/index.html>

The Salt Lake Tribune: Tradition on Hold for Giriček

The life of a Croatian basketball player in the NBA is not as glamorous off court during the holidays, as the Salt Lake Tribune observes in a December 25 article. However, the resolute Croatian NBA star of the Utah Jazz, guard Gordan Giriček, says that "there is no time for sorry" in the middle of the basketball season, despite the holidays he is forced to spend far from home and without his family, especially his 21-month old daughter Lara, who lives in Croatia. Gordan is at peace spending the quiet and somewhat lonely holiday season in Salt Lake City, keeping warm with hopes of spending many future holidays at home with his family in his beloved Croatia.



Gordan Giriček (right) caught in action while playing defense on one of the finest NBA shooters, Seattle Supersonics' Ray Allen. [Photo: www.espn.com]

See the full Salt Lake Tribune article at: http://www.sltrib.com/search/ci_3342758

Currently Gordan Giriček is entering his fourth NBA season playing for Utah Jazz. Before his career with Utah, he was playing for the Memphis Grizzlies and Orlando Magic. In his four NBA years, Giriček has developed into a solid shooter in the NBA, averaging 11 points per game. Considering that Giriček is only 28, we believe that his best days are still to come.

For more information about Giriček's NBA career and his personal statistics, please visit: <http://sports.espn.go.com/nba/players/profile?statsId=3363>

News in Brief...

- Croatia is among world leaders in the implementation of mobile payments, the Arthur D. Little consulting firm has reported. Mobile payment, or m-payment, is the use of a mobile device during the transaction process for payments at places like vending machines, retail stores, or over the Internet. According to the consulting firm's study, Croatia has one of the most developed m-payment markets in Central and Eastern Europe. [For more information, please go to: <http://www.dmeurope.com/default.asp?ArticleID=3180>]
- Members of the Zagreb Jewish Municipality on Dec. 25, 2005, marked the beginning of Hanukkah, the Feast of Lights. With Hanukkah, Jews mark the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. One candle is lit every evening for eight days, the duration of the festival.
- The United Nations Development Program (UNPD) Office in Zagreb presented a manual on socially responsible business called "Honourably to Victory". The manual was based on a 2000 publication by the British organization "Business in the Community", which gives the business sector recommendations on how to apply social responsibility programs.
- Croatian skier Janica Kostelić came in third at the slalom race that was held in Lienz and is currently first in overall World Cup rankings. Other Croatian skiers, Nika Fleiss and Ana Jelušić, finished 18th and 20th respectively.



Croatian skier Janica Kostelić does not cease to impress with her performances. [Photo: www.iskon.hr]

- Everything is ready for a slalom race, which will be held on Mount Sljeme near Zagreb on Jan. 5, 2006, as part of the women's FIS World Cup this season. The slalom, which is the second FIS World Cup race to be held on Sljeme, is expected to attract 30,000 spectators.

Embassy of the Republic of Croatia
2343 Massachusetts Avenue, NW 20008
Contact: Josip Babić
E-mail: presscro@yahoo.com
Visit us on the web! <http://us.mfa.hr>