

2026

CROATIA
Full of life

GOLDEN PEN media award



Golden Pen media award – Kvarner Region

In the beautiful setting of the Hilton Rijeka Costabella Beach Resort & Spa, the 22nd edition of the Golden Pen awards ceremony was held on April 16, 2026. The event was traditionally organized by the Croatian National Tourist Board, this time in cooperation with and supported by the host, the Kvarner Tourist Board, which in 2026 proudly holds the title of European Region of Gastronomy.

The Golden Pen awards are given to respected and well-known foreign editors, journalists, travel bloggers, and influencers for the best media coverage of Croatia as a tourist destination in the previous year. This year's gala ceremony was attended by 23 international media representatives from 14 countries.

The most prestigious award of the Golden Pen is the Grand Prix, which this year was presented in five categories: best print media feature, best online media feature, best radio feature or podcast, best television feature, and best travel blog or influencer post. Exceptionally this year, two special recognitions were also awarded for outstanding media contribution to the promotion of Croatia and Croatian tourism.

It should also be noted that within this year's Golden Pen program, the Croatian National Tourist Board, together with its partners, organized a three-day study trip. Foreign journalists, bloggers, and influencers had the opportunity to experience the cultural and historical landmarks and attractions of Opatija and Rijeka, while special emphasis was placed on the island of Krk, where participants discovered the richness of local authentic products and traditions through tastings of premium olive oils, local wines, prosciutto, and cheeses.

GRAND PRIX AWARDS

GRAND PRIX FOR BEST PRINT MEDIA FEATURE

UNITED KINGDOM

Mary Novakovich

The Grand Prix for Best Print Feature was awarded to Mary Novakovich of the United Kingdom for her article Your Ultimate Guide to Croatia, published in the prestigious British daily newspaper The Daily Mail.

Mary Novakovich is one of Britain's most respected travel journalists and a leading international authority on Croatia. Through many years of dedicated work, extensive knowledge of the country and a continuous commitment to exploring its lesser-known destinations, she has established herself as one of Croatia's foremost international ambassadors.

Her writing is distinguished by its authenticity, depth of research and the remarkable breadth of topics she covers. She places particular emphasis on Croatia's natural beauty, cultural heritage and the diversity of its destinations, offering readers a comprehensive and engaging perspective on the country.

Published in a prominent position in the weekend edition of The Daily Mail, the award-winning feature provides an inspiring and comprehensive guide to Croatia. The article attracted significant readership, was widely shared and received highly positive reviews, once again demonstrating the author's exceptional expertise, professionalism and genuine affection for Croatia.

In recognition of her outstanding contribution to Croatia's international promotion, her long-standing dedication and her continuous production of high-quality travel journalism, Mary Novakovich is a highly deserving recipient of the Golden Pen Grand Prix for Best Print Feature.



GRAND PRIX FOR BEST ONLINE FEATURE

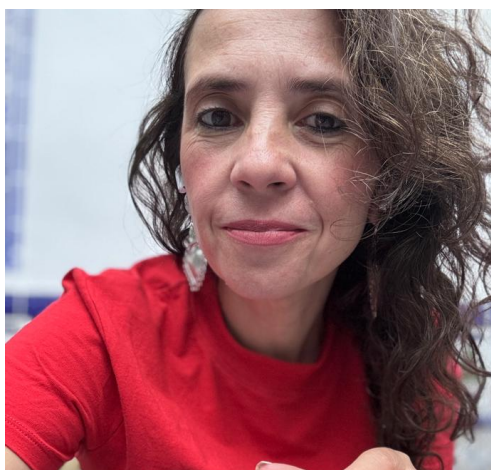
ITALY

Chiara Carolei

The Grand Prix for Best Online Feature was awarded to Chiara Carolei of Italy for her article published on La Cucina Italiana, one of Italy's most influential food and lifestyle media platforms. In her feature, the author presents Lika-Senj County in a compelling and engaging way, highlighting its greatest assets: unspoilt nature, rich cultural heritage and authentic gastronomy. She describes the region as the "green heart of Croatia," emphasising its unique blend of spectacular landscapes and a traditional way of life. Particular attention is devoted to Plitvice Lakes National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and Northern Velebit National Park, one of Croatia's most attractive destinations for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. At the same time, the author points out that Lika-Senj County is far more than an outdoor destination. She presents it as a region renowned for its outstanding culinary traditions, based on locally sourced ingredients such as game, mountain cheeses, potatoes and wild herbs. According to the author, whether prepared using traditional recipes or interpreted through contemporary cuisine, every dish reflects a profound connection with nature and local customs.

Published on the digital edition of La Cucina Italiana, which reaches approximately five million readers each month, the article made a significant contribution to promoting Lika-Senj County and Croatia on the strategically important Italian outbound travel market. Through an authentic and inspiring narrative, the author successfully presents the region as a unique destination where exceptional natural heritage, outstanding gastronomy and a sustainable way of life come together.

For its exceptional storytelling, extensive reach and significant promotional impact, the feature is a worthy recipient of the Golden Pen Grand Prix for Best Online Feature.



GRAND PRIX FOR BEST RADIO FEATURE OR PODCAST

IRELAND

Fergal O'Keeffe

The Grand Prix for Best Radio Feature or Podcast was awarded to Fergal O'Keeffe of Ireland for an outstanding podcast dedicated to Croatia. In this heartfelt and authentic episode, he introduced listeners to the beauty of Croatia's islands, its rich cultural heritage, exceptional gastronomy and the warm hospitality of its people, drawing on his own travel experiences throughout the country.

The result is an engaging and deeply personal podcast in which the author speaks with genuine admiration about the authenticity of Croatian destinations, the beauty of the Adriatic Sea and its landscapes, the unique island way of life, the country's outstanding cuisine and cultural heritage, and, above all, the warmth and friendliness of the Croatian people.

He particularly emphasises that it was the relaxed pace of life and the distinctive spirit of the Croatian islands that left the strongest impression on his entire family, including his children, who continue to speak enthusiastically about their journey to this day.

The podcast achieved remarkable success, recording 352,000 downloads, becoming the most-listened-to episode of 2025, and reaching No. 1 on the Irish podcast charts.

Combining a personal perspective, authentic storytelling and exceptional audience reach, the episode became one of the most successful international media features about Croatia produced during the past year. For this reason, Fergal O'Keeffe is a thoroughly deserving recipient of the Golden Pen Grand Prix for Best Radio Feature or Podcast.



GRAND PRIX FOR BEST TELEVISION FEATURE

SOUTH KOREA

Dohyeong Park

The Grand Prix for Best Television Feature was awarded to Dohyeong Park of South Korea for his series of travel documentaries broadcast on the national television channel EBS 1TV. Across four meticulously produced episodes, Park introduced Korean audiences to Croatia from a fresh perspective, highlighting the country's authenticity, commitment to sustainability and outstanding gastronomic offer.

Unlike conventional travel programmes that primarily focus on well-known tourist attractions, Dohyeong Park placed particular emphasis on Croatia's lesser-known destinations and their unique character. His series showcased the centuries-old wine-making tradition of Ilok, the distinctive landscapes of the island of Pag, and Croatia's rich culinary heritage through stories about truffles, oysters and premium wines. At the same time, he presented sustainable tourism as an integral part of experiencing Croatia in a meaningful and responsible way.

The series was broadcast during the peak of the 2025 summer tourist season on EBS 1TV, South Korea's leading public educational television channel, ensuring exceptional visibility among Korean viewers. Thanks to its outstanding production quality, striking cinematography and thoughtfully crafted storytelling, the programme successfully strengthened Croatia's position as a premium, sustainable travel destination while showcasing the diversity of its natural, cultural and gastronomic heritage.

Through its original editorial approach, high production standards and strong promotional impact on one of Croatia's most important long-haul outbound markets, Dohyeong Park has made an outstanding contribution to the international promotion of Croatia. He is therefore a highly deserving recipient of the Golden Pen Grand Prix for Best Television Feature.



GRAND PRIX FOR BEST TRAVEL BLOG OR INFLUENCER POST

POLAND

Agata Kopiec and Łukasz Wróblewski

The Grand Prix in the influencer category was won by Agata Kopiec and Łukasz Wróblewski from Poland for the content published on their YouTube and Instagram channels He Vs. Ona. Through a distinctive blend of humor, authenticity and travel content, they presented Croatia to a wide audience in an original way, bringing its destinations closer to each other through the experiences and adventures of one couple. During their stay in Croatia, they recorded their impressions from the Ultra Europe festival in Split, explored the city streets, visited the Plitvice Lakes National Park and enjoyed the famous sunset in Zadar. Instead of classic tourism promotion, they presented Croatian destinations through their own experiences, mutual conversations and humorous situations, creating content that their audience can easily identify with. With authentic storytelling, a creative approach and a large social media reach, they have successfully presented Croatia as an attractive, diverse and hospitable destination to younger generations of travelers. Their work shows how modern digital content can be an extremely effective tool in promoting a destination, which is why Agata Kopiec and Łukasz Wróblewski fully deserve the Grand Prix in the influencer category.



SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS FOR OUTSTANDING MEDIA CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROMOTION OF CROATIA AND CROATIAN TOURISM

CZECH REPUBLIC

Deník & denik.cz

One of the two special recognitions was awarded to the Czech media outlet Deník. It is the most widely read newspaper in the country, reaching more than 1.7 million readers. The Croatian Deník project builds on a tradition dating back to 2007 and 2008, when journalists reported directly from the Croatian coast. Revived as a dynamic digital platform, it continues to deliver authentic stories and valuable insights for Czech tourists, and in 2025 it achieved record growth.



POLAND

Bartek Kieżun

The second special award went to Bartek Kieżun from Poland for his long-standing promotion of Croatia by showcasing its culture, gastronomy and natural beauty. In his texts and projects, he continuously presents our country in an inspiring way, using a strong travelogue and visual approach, just like in the program Droga przez mąkę.

NOMINEES PRESENT AT THE AWARDS CEREMONY

BEST PRINT MEDIA FEATURE

AUSTRIA

Brigitte Mussil-Egger

An experienced travel journalist with many years of international experience, gained while working at the Viennese daily Kronen Zeitung, since 2016 she has dedicated herself entirely to travel journalism and every year she makes numerous trips and reports from various destinations around the world.

Thanks to her Croatian roots and strong personal connection to Croatia, she has been getting to know the country since childhood through stays in Novi Vinodolski and family trips to Cres and Savudrija. It is precisely this long-standing connection with Croatia that has enabled her to faithfully convey the authenticity of the destination in her texts, combining professional journalistic experience with personal experience.

In the award-winning article, she presents the diversity of the Kvarner region vividly and impressively, highlighting its natural beauty, cultural heritage and unique atmosphere. With a clear style, a keen eye for detail, and convincing storytelling, she successfully introduces readers to the unique features of the Croatian Kvarner and stimulates interest and desire to travel. By combining professional experience, an authentic approach, and a sincere connection to Croatia, the author has made a valuable contribution to the international promotion of Croatian tourism, presenting Kvarner as an attractive and diverse destination.



BELGIUM

Tine Bongaerts

A trained storyteller, creative concept artist and specialist travel journalist, her work inspires readers to explore nature through active and sustainable travel. She pays special attention to authentic experiences that connect natural beauty, local culture and a responsible attitude towards the environment.

In her award-winning article, she takes readers along the picturesque route of the former narrow-gauge railway of Parenzana, presenting Istria as an ideal destination for cyclists and lovers of active holidays. Through vivid storytelling, she highlights the diversity of Croatian landscapes, the richness of local heritage and the special charm of travelling at your own pace, while meeting the hospitable locals. The article successfully promotes the concept of a slower, sustainable and healthy way of travelling, encouraging adventurers of all levels of experience to discover the natural and cultural values of Istria authentically. With a positive tone, impressive descriptions and an inspiring approach, the author effectively brings the beauty of Croatian destinations closer to an international audience and contributes to the promotion of Croatia as an attractive destination for active and sustainable tourism.



POLAND

Bartek Kieżun

A prominent gastronomic journalist, travel writer, author and lecturer, Bartek Kieżun has been promoting Croatian gastronomy, culture and tourist destinations to the Polish audience for years through print media, radio shows and his books. With his many years of work, he has become one of the most significant international promoters of Croatian eno-gastronomic heritage, which is why he has been nominated in several categories for his contribution to the promotion of Croatia.

A special place in his work is occupied by the book *Croatia to Eat*, published at the end of 2024, which aroused great interest on the Polish market and during the winter of 2024/2025 became one of the best-selling gastronomic titles in the EMPIK bookstore chain. In the book, the author uniquely combines personal experiences, historical stories and traditional recipes, presenting the richness of Croatian cuisine, culture and tourist destinations to a wide range of readers.

In the nominated article *Gdzie dojrzewają figi* (Where Figs Ripen), published in the prestigious Polish lifestyle monthly *Twój Styl*, the author celebrates the Mediterranean way of life, authentic local flavours and the richness of Croatian gastronomic tradition. Through an impressive reportage, he brings readers closer to the beauty of Croatian landscapes, the importance of local ingredients and the unique blend of history, culture and gastronomy that makes Croatia a recognisable Mediterranean destination. With his expert knowledge, recognisable authorial style and long-standing commitment to promoting Croatia, Bartek Kieżun has made an exceptional contribution to the international affirmation of Croatian gastronomy and tourism and has distinguished himself as one of its most important ambassadors on the Polish market.



BEST ONLINE FEATURE

HUNGARY

Gábor Tenczer and Daniel Fiantok

Gábor Tenczer and Daniel Fiantok explore Croatia off the beaten track, visiting the Red Elf's Hut on Dinara, Croatia's highest peak. Their story brings hidden trails, impressive landscapes and mountain customs, presenting Croatia as a land of nature and authentic experiences.



USA

Skye Mayring

Skye Mayring is a specialised travel writer and destination expert who provides valuable and practical information to travel consultants and professionals in the travel industry. Her expert approach helps them create better, simpler and more customised trips, transforming detailed knowledge of the destination into useful recommendations for everyday work.

In the nominated article, she provides a clear and comprehensive guide to planning a trip to Croatia, covering key topics such as the best time to visit, transport connections, organising a trip and choosing destinations according to travellers' interests. She presents complex information clearly and practically, allowing travel consultants to more easily adapt their recommendations to the needs of clients.

The value of the article lies in its applicability and educational character. The author successfully combines expert knowledge of Croatia with concrete advice that makes it easier for travel professionals to promote and sell Croatian destinations and contribute to creating higher-quality and more authentic experiences for visitors. In doing so, she makes a significant contribution to strengthening Croatia's recognition as an attractive, diverse and easily accessible tourist destination.



SLOVAKIA

Jakub Prokeš

Travel writer Jakub Prokeš reveals the lesser-known faces of Croatia through his work, focusing on authentic stories, hidden landscapes and local communities that often remain off the beaten tourist trail. He considers Croatia his second home and visits it regularly with his family, developing a deep personal connection with its people, culture and tradition.

His connection to Croatia has been further strengthened by learning the Croatian language and living in a Slovak village founded by Croats, which allows him to experience Croatian heritage and lifestyle from an authentic, local perspective. It is this closeness that is recognised in his texts, which stand out for their honesty, attention to detail and desire to bring readers closer to lesser-known but extremely valuable parts of Croatia.

In the award-winning reportage Hidden Treasures of Dalmatia, the author takes readers off the usual tourist itineraries, discovering the beauty of Dalmatian landscapes, the hospitality of the local population and the unique experiences that shape the identity of this region. Instead of the most famous attractions, he focuses on authentic stories, atmosphere and details that present Croatia as a country of surprises, diversity and unforgettable experiences.

With his distinctive authorial approach and long-standing commitment to Croatia, Jakub Prokeš makes a valuable contribution to its international promotion, encouraging readers to get to know the authentic Croatia outside the beaten tourist paths.



SLOVENIA

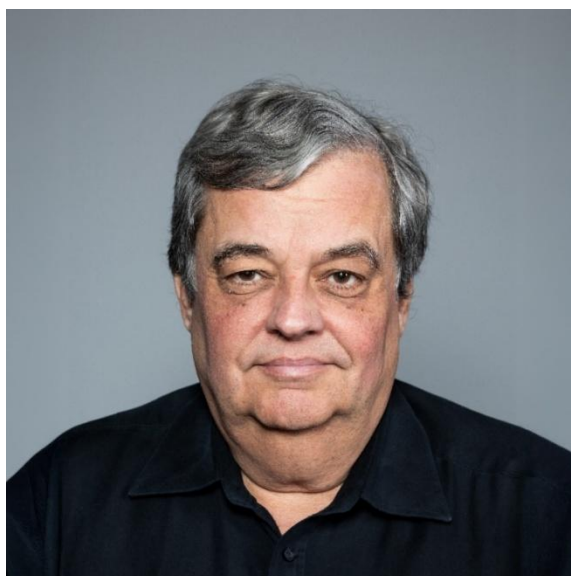
Srdjan Cvjetović

An experienced journalist and author specialising in travel, culture and lifestyle topics, Srdjan Cvjetović has been contributing to the promotion of Croatia on the Slovenian market for many years with his high-quality and professional work. Through publications in relevant online media, he successfully brings Croatian destinations closer to a modern digital audience, presenting them through authentic stories, local experiences and cultural heritage.

His texts are characterised by clarity, informativeness and a sense of detail, with a special emphasis on the experience of the destination and stories that go beyond the usual tourist promotion. In the article The Old Lady – Stara Dama, he impressively presents the charm of Opatija, leading readers through more than 180 years of its rich history, architecture and tradition, and highlighting the special features that make this destination unique.

With his authentic writing style and modern approach to digital storytelling, the author successfully conveys local stories that create an emotional connection with the destination and stimulate interest in travel. His content achieves a high level of readership and audience engagement, thereby significantly contributing to the positive perception of Croatia as an attractive, diverse and culturally rich tourist destination on the Slovenian market.

Through continuous and dedicated work, Srdjan Cvjetović is confirmed as one of the important promoters of Croatia among the Slovenian media, making a valuable contribution to its international promotion.



BEST RADIO FEATURE OR PODCAST

FRANCE

Stéphan Szeremeta

In his radio report broadcast on Sud Radio, Stéphan Szeremeta presents Croatia as the pearl of the Adriatic, bringing its diversity, accessibility and wealth of tourist offers closer to French listeners. Through dynamic and informative storytelling, he successfully highlights Croatia as a destination that offers experiences tailored to different interests and profiles of travellers.

The show places special emphasis on the various possibilities for active vacations – from water sports to hiking, cycling and climbing – presenting Croatia as an ideal destination for nature and outdoor lovers. At the same time, he highlights the rich cultural heritage, presenting cities such as Split and historic Omiš, and recommends trips outside the peak tourist season, when visitors can experience the natural beauty and authenticity of Croatian destinations in a more relaxed atmosphere.

By combining natural beauty, cultural heritage and a diverse range of activities, the author successfully builds an image of Croatia as an attractive, versatile and easily accessible destination for the French market. His professionally designed and informative reportage represents a valuable contribution to the promotion of Croatia and encourages listeners to discover its many special features throughout the year.



GERMANY

Bernd Uwe Gutknecht

Bernd Uwe Gutknecht is the author of the documentary series *Pirates of the Adriatic – Wild Times on the Croatian Coast*, which brings to life one of the most interesting chapters of Croatian and Adriatic history in an investigative, educational and visually impressive way. Through thorough journalistic research, interviews with distinguished historians and carefully reconstructed historical events, the series brings the viewer closer to the complex political, social and economic relations on the Adriatic in the early modern period.

Special attention is paid to the Uskoks, whose historical role is presented outside of established stereotypes, in the broader context of European conflicts between the great powers. A clear narrative structure, a high level of journalistic responsibility and high-quality production make complex historical topics understandable, interesting and relevant to a contemporary audience.

Broadcast on ARD and Bavarian Radio, the series achieved significant reach among the German audience and made a valuable contribution to the international promotion of Croatian cultural and historical heritage. By combining investigative journalism, quality storytelling and educational content, it successfully presents Croatia as a country with a rich, layered and European-significant history, contributing to strengthening its international reputation and recognition.



POLAND

Bartek Kieżun

Bartek Kieżun was a guest on the long-running radio show *Droga przez mąkę*, one of the most respected Polish programs dedicated to the connection between culture and gastronomy. For more than ten years, the show has brought together prominent authors, culinary historians, writers, chefs and other experts, exploring the cultural, historical and social dimensions of gastronomy.

The reason for the guest appearance was his book *Croatia to Eat*, and through an inspiring conversation, the author shared with great passion memories, stories and experiences from his numerous travels around Croatia. He highlighted Croatian gastronomy as a reflection of the country's rich and diverse history, explaining how different cultural influences have shaped its regional culinary traditions and authentic flavours.

He particularly emphasised the diversity of Croatian cuisine, emphasising that fish gastronomy is not only a feature of the Adriatic coast, but also occupies an important place in continental regions, including Slavonia. Through a series of interesting examples, he brought the richness of Croatia's enogastronomic heritage closer to the Polish audience, connecting food with the history, identity and lifestyle of local communities. With his expert knowledge, distinctive storytelling style and sincere enthusiasm for Croatia, Bartek Kieżun made a valuable contribution to the promotion of Croatian gastronomy and culture among the Polish audience, confirming his role as one of the most important international promoters of Croatian culinary heritage.



BEST TELEVISION FEATURE

NETHERLANDS

Gerben Van Ommen and Johanna Brouwer

Gerben Van Ommen and Johanna Brouwer are the creators of the Dutch travel television series *Rail Away*, which presents landscapes, local culture and everyday life in different regions of the world through scenic train journeys. Recognisable for its calm, observational style of storytelling, the series gives viewers an authentic experience of destinations and promotes sustainable and responsible travel. In two episodes dedicated to Croatia, the authors take viewers through the interior of Istria and Hrvatsko Zagorje, discovering lesser-known but extremely attractive parts of the country. The journey through Istria begins in Buzet and continues along the railway to Pula, highlighting green landscapes, historic towns and authentic life outside the most famous tourist centres. The second episode takes you through Hrvatsko Zagorje, from Varaždin via Zabok to Gornja Stubica, presenting the hilly landscape, cultural heritage and everyday life of local communities connected to Zagreb by railway. Instead of a classic tourist promotion, *Rail Away* uses the railway as the main narrator, offering viewers a different perspective on Croatia – one that emphasises natural beauty, regional diversity, local communities and a slower pace of travel. Such an approach is fully in line with the growing trend of slow travel in the Dutch market, where train travel is one of the most desirable and environmentally sustainable ways to get to know destinations. With almost half a million viewers per episode, the series achieved significant promotional reach and successfully introduced continental and green Croatia to an audience looking for authentic experiences and sustainable forms of travel. By combining top-notch production, unobtrusive storytelling and strong promotion of natural and cultural heritage, Gerben Van Ommen and Johanna Brouwer made a valuable contribution to the international promotion of Croatia as a diverse, sustainable and year-round tourist destination.



HUNGARY

Zsóka Szabó

Zsóka Szabó is the author of a series of television reports that present Dubrovnik as an attractive year-round destination in an original and meaningful way. Through six reports broadcast on Hungarian public television, she brings the city closer to viewers from a perspective that goes beyond the usual image of a summer tourist destination, emphasising its cultural heritage, history and authentic atmosphere outside the main tourist season.

The television team's initial intention was to film a report about Advent Dubrovnik, but the wealth of material collected resulted in a series of six thematic reports. After three reports broadcast during 2024, three more sequels were shown in early 2025 dedicated to Hungarian historical traces in Dubrovnik, the city's rich literary heritage and its role as an internationally renowned film location.

Through carefully crafted storytelling and high-quality television production, the author successfully presents Dubrovnik as a destination of rich cultural and historical value that offers visitors diverse and authentic experiences throughout the year. It particularly highlights the benefits of travelling outside the peak tourist season, contributing to the promotion of more sustainable and year-round tourism.

The series of reports significantly contributed to the promotion of Dubrovnik and Croatia on the Hungarian market, offering viewers a new perspective on one of the most recognisable Croatian cities and confirming its status as a destination that successfully combines history, culture and a modern lifestyle throughout the year.



BEST TRAVEL BLOG OR INFLUENCER POST

CHINA

Zhaohui Li

Zhaohui Li is one of the leading content creators for family and luxury travel on the Chinese platform Xiaohongshu, where she inspires a large number of followers with her authentic stories and recommendations. Having travelled to more than 40 countries, she has developed a distinctive storytelling style that combines top-notch travel experiences with warm family moments. She is often accompanied on her travels by her six-year-old daughter Isabella, whom she lovingly calls her “mini me”. Together, they create content that shows that the most valuable journeys are those shared with those closest to them, inspiring families to explore the world together and create lasting memories.

During their stay in Croatia, they presented the beauty of the Dalmatian coast through authentic experiences and carefully selected moments that highlight the natural beauty, the top quality of the destination and the special atmosphere of family travel. Their posts successfully connect luxury experiences with sincere emotions and family values, creating content that strongly resonates with family and premium travellers.

With his distinctive style, great influence on the Chinese market and authentic representation of Croatia, Zhaohui Li makes a valuable contribution to promoting the country as a destination that simultaneously offers top-notch experiences, safety, natural beauty and unforgettable family moments.



SWEDEN

Hannah Graaf

Hannah Graaf is a media personality, influencer and lifestyle blogger who shares stories about family life, travel and lifestyle with more than 120,000 followers on social media and her blog in Damernas Värld magazine. With her authentic approach and great influence, she inspires her audience to discover destinations she personally knows and loves.

Croatia holds a special place in her posts, and she cherishes a special connection with Primošten, which she considers her second home. Through numerous posts, she shows everyday life on the Croatian coast - from walks along cobblestone streets and stays in olive groves to enjoying local wines, gastronomy and the Mediterranean lifestyle. It is this personal connection that gives the content additional credibility and emotional value.

With her photos, videos and stories, Hannah Graaf successfully brings the beauty of the Croatian coast, the authenticity of the local culture and the hospitality of the hosts closer to the Swedish audience. Instead of classic tourism promotion, she presents Croatia through her own experiences and family moments, encouraging followers to experience the destination sincerely and authentically.

By continuously promoting Croatia and her strong influence on the Swedish market, Hannah Graaf makes a valuable contribution to Croatia's international recognition as an attractive destination for vacations, family trips, and a quality Mediterranean lifestyle.

