The Road Less Traveled: Prospects for Tourism Growth in Slovenia

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THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED:
PROSPECTS FOR TOURISM GROWTH
IN SLOVENIA

Andrew De Lena

Introduction

Tourism has been a major industry in the Republic of Slovenia since it became an independent nation in 1991. Tourism has seen consistently strong growth throughout the past 20 years, now accounting for 13 percent of Slovenia’s GDP and 13 percent of its total employment (“Travel and Tourism: Economic Impact...,” p. 1). Although Slovenia is a small country of only two million people, its history, location, and landscape provide it unique advantages in the global tourism marketplace. If Slovenia can continue to capitalize on these advantages, its tourism industry will continue to grow and possibly offer a lifeline to its economy as a whole in these tough economic times.

In this article, I provide a brief overview of the current global tourism market as well as a situational analysis of Slovenia’s position within it. I then outline steps Slovenia could take to further strengthen the growth of its tourism industry. In short, I believe Slovenian tourism needs strong, targeted marketing coordinated with other supporting programs to increase international visibility. In addition, these steps need to be executed with an environmentally conscious mindset, ensuring a green, sustainable, healthy future for Slovenia and its people. Slovenia must craft and control its image and present a healthy, progressive, unified face to the international tourism community.

Snapshot of Global Tourism and the Central Role of Europe

Since the middle of the twentieth century, global tourism has grown exponentially. In 1950, 25 million people traveled internationally and spent a grand total of $2.1 billion (“Tourism Market Trends,” p. 1). In 2012, the most recent data available, the number of international tourist arrivals surpassed 1 billion, and tourism-generated exports topped $1.3 trillion. By 2030, the UN World Tourism Organization estimates that international tourist
arrivals will reach 1.8 billion (“UNWTO…,” p. 2). Somewhat surprisingly, tourism has not been severely affected by the global economic cycle; the “great recession” beginning in 2008 caused only a small dip in international tourists, and growth in the industry quickly resumed. This growth has been especially remarkable in Europe, the world’s most popular tourist destination. Collectively, the economies of the 27 countries in the European Union (EU) shrank by 0.4 percent in 2012 (Eurostat); however, during that same time, international tourism arrivals to the EU grew by 2.4 percent. This was significantly higher than its average growth of 1.7 percent between 2005 and 2012 (“UNWTO…,” p. 4), and, in fact, the weakened European economy may have been the reason for this growth. A weaker euro makes traveling in typically pricey European countries more affordable. All in all, tourism’s relative insulation from, or even inverse relationship to, the global financial markets provides a good stabilizing force in a country’s economy.

While global tourism may be a trillion dollar industry, to speak of it as a unified whole is somewhat misleading. In reality, international tourism comes in many different shapes and sizes. The first major variable is the reason for which people travel. As the tourism industry has grown, many different methods of segmenting and classifying it have arisen. In 2012, 52 percent of international tourists claimed they traveled primarily for leisure purposes; 27 percent traveled for religion or health or to visit friends or relatives; 14 percent traveled for business; and 7 percent did not specify. Travelers’ points of origin are also important. In addition to being the largest destination region for tourism, accounting for 52 percent of total arrivals and 43 percent of total tourism expenditure, Europe is also the leading source for international tourists, supplying 52 percent of total departures. This makes sense taken together with the fact that four out of five international tourists visit destinations within their own region (“UNWTO…,” pp. 4–13). Europe is mainly composed of relatively small countries packed tightly together, and cross-border transportation between them is relatively easy.

Its economies also tend to be highly developed, giving people the means to travel to the diversity of destinations available to them. More generally, friends, family, and business associates are also more likely to be in neighboring countries than distant ones. All these characteristics combine to make Europe the hub of global tourism.

Tourism in Slovenia

Tourism is one of the most important industries in the Slovenian economy and has seen consistently strong growth throughout its young history. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the industry directly contributed €1.276 billion to Slovenia’s economy in 2012, or 3.5 percent of the total GDP. It also represents 3.9 percent of total employment. But when indirect and induced effects are factored in, the total contribution of travel and tourism to the Slovenian GDP is an estimated €4.648 billion, or 13 percent. This is slightly below the world average of 14.1 percent. Tourism is also responsible for 13 percent of total employment in Slovenia. Unfortunately, there are reasons to fear that growth in the industry may be leveling off. The WTTC expects the value of Slovenian tourism to grow at a rate of 3.3 percent per year through 2023, which places it 138th of the 184 countries analyzed (“Travel and Tourism Economic Impact…,” pp. 1–8). The Slovenian economy as a whole is also projected to continue shrinking until 2015 (“Slovenia…”). Therefore, taking measures to ensure strong tourism growth throughout the next few years is especially vital.

As is the case with global tourism, the particular shape of Slovenian tourism is important to understand. Slovenia is primarily a regional tourist destination. The top ten origination points of tourists in Slovenia are, in descending order, Italy, Austria, Germany, Russia, Croatia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Serbia, Belgium, and Hungary. All are located in Europe, and all four of Slovenia’s

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1 Croatia joined the EU on July 1, 2013; therefore, it is not included in these figures.

2 Induced effects include spending and other economic contributions by employees of the tourism industry; indirect effects include money spent investing in tourism and purchases from suppliers lower down the supply chain. For more complete definitions, see “Travel and Tourism: Economic Impact….”
bordering countries are present. Upon arriving in Slovenia, the most common tourist destinations within the country are the Karst region near the coast, Ljubljana, Gorenjska, and Savinjska, which together account for 65 percent of all overnight stays. Karst and Gorenjska alone account for 40 percent of overnight stays. Viewed another way, spa, coastal (i.e., Karst), and mountain (e.g., Gorenjska and Savinjska) destinations are the most popular types in Slovenia, accounting for 78 percent of overnight stays (“Slovenian Tourism in Numbers,” pp. 8–10).

Slovenian Tourism: SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis, an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, is an important tool used by many businesses when dealing with matters of long-term strategic planning. The strengths and weaknesses sections are focused on internal qualities of the company, or in this case the country. The opportunities and threats sections focus on the environment external to the company (country) and provide a list of elements in the business environment that can be used to the country’s advantage as well as a list of those that could be barriers to success. Given the complexity of Slovenia’s relationship to the global tourism market and the variety of potential marketing paths it could pursue, it is necessary to carefully examine each of these four elements.

Strengths

Underneath the glamorous, eye-catching tourism attractions, solid infrastructure is vital to providing visitors with a high-quality experience. Slovenia has several competitive advantages over its neighbors and even goes toe-to-toe with traditionally popular destinations like Italy in many areas. Slovenia has well-developed and comparatively strong lodging, ground transportation, and internet/connectivity infrastructure. This means plenty of hotel rooms, rental cars, ATMs, and internet access, all of which are advantageous for growing Slovenia’s tourism sector. In addition to these infrastructural conveniences, the legal measures in place to protect Slovenia’s natural environment are valuable assets. Although it does have some looming environmental issues (discussed later), it nevertheless ranked 28th of 132 economies on the World Economic Forum’s Environmental Performance Index in 2013, ranked 16th in the quality of its natural environment, and placed 1st in the number of environmental treaties ratified. Slovenia is also one of the safest countries in the world. While some of these qualities are not always readily apparent, they are of crucial importance for a robust tourism industry (Blanke and Chiesa, pp. 316–17).

Slovenia also possesses other advantages that could help it become an even more popular tourist destination. Perhaps the most obvious is its location. Slovenia is nestled in the heart of south-central Europe, less than a two-hour plane ride from virtually all major European cities. It also uses the euro and is a part of the Schengen area, meaning that travelers from the 26 other Schengen countries can traverse its borders freely, without a passport. These factors are especially important given the changing patterns of vacation length and frequency in the modern world. According to former United States World Tourism Organization secretary general Francesco Frangialli, many people are starting to forego long vacations in favor of shorter, more frequent trips of a few days each (Kanter). For shorter trips of this sort, long travel times, customs, and currency exchange become a hassle. The absence of all of these barriers makes Slovenia a highly convenient place to get away for a few days.

Slovenia is convenient not only from the outside: its small size means that even the remote, rural parts of the country are easily accessible from the country’s urban centers. For tourists staying in Ljubljana, virtually any other location in the country is less than a two-hour drive away. Therefore, tourists can stay in the large cities, such as Ljubljana or Maribor, for the duration of their visit yet still easily enjoy all the secluded, natural landscapes and attractions Slovenia has to offer. Aside from convenience, this is an important ecological point. It means Slovenia can avoid building hotels and other large, intrusive structures in the middle of its unspoiled wilderness, allowing it to remain highly conserved and undeveloped even as tourism volume continues to grow. Also,
although Slovenia is small in size, it has an incredible diversity of attractions due to its geological situation. Slovenia is one of the most biodiverse countries on earth, located at the crossroads of the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Dinaric Alps, and the Pannonian Basin (Perko, p. 11). With a full 60 percent of its land area covered by woods, it is one of the most densely forested countries in Europe (“Slovenian Forest...”) as well as one of the most water rich (“World Water Day 2011”). Thermal springs, skiing, rafting, hiking, caves, wineries, fine dining, culture, art—all of these things can be found in the tiny country of Slovenia. In short, tourists to Slovenia do not have to sacrifice variety and excitement for convenience, even if they only stay for a short time.

Another equally important factor is the high degree of multilingualism in Slovenia—92 percent of Slovenians are at least bilingual, and an impressive 67 percent are at least trilingual. And, not only do many Slovenians speak foreign languages but also they speak the right foreign languages. Fifty-nine percent of Slovenians speak English, and 42 percent speak German. German is the most widely spoken mother tongue in Europe, and English is the most widely spoken foreign language. All told, 27 percent of all Europeans speak German, and 51 percent of all Europeans speak English (“Special Eurobarometer....,” pp. 5–21). These numbers will continue to grow as more and more young people learn English and German in Slovenian public schools.

**Weaknesses**

Although Slovenian tourism is strong in many ways, it also possesses several internal weaknesses that need to be addressed. One major issue is the degree of openness in Slovenian society towards foreign interests. A 2012 study of the Slovenian public’s feelings toward the country’s national brand provides an illustrative example. The researchers asked passers-by to rank the seven brands Slovenia has used to promote itself over the past 30 years, in order of favorite to least favorite. The slogan, “Slovenia: my country,” from 1986, before Slovenia even gained its independence, was still the most well liked among the sampled population almost 30 years later. It beat out alternatives, such as “Slovenia: On the sunny side of Alps” and, notably, the current brand, “I FEEL SLOVENIA” (Ruzzier and Petek, p. 477). Far from being an innocuous historical holdover, this attachment to the idea of independence manifests itself in real economic terms. Foreign direct investment, especially the spillover of new technology and ideas, can be a major economic boon to small, developed countries (Borensztein et al., p. 115). Slovenia, however, ranks 129th in the prevalence of foreign ownership and 122nd in the impact of rules on foreign direct investment (Blanke and Chiesa, p. 317). Slovenians value their independence highly and are wary of being taken advantage of, understandably, given their history of subjugation by foreign powers. However, these values need to be balanced with the understanding that openness to some foreign influence and ideas is necessary for a healthy economy and a healthy tourism industry. In the marketing of tourism, especially, I would argue that many of Slovenia’s shortcomings are due to the lack of an outside-looking-in perspective, which could be gained by enlisting the help of foreign, multi-national organizations.

Also, as I alluded to, Slovenia has struggled somewhat in its national branding efforts. Several interrelated issues are largely responsible for this. Until very recently, Slovenia’s branding efforts were shortsighted, with high turnover. From 1986 to 1996 the government, first regional and later sovereign, ran three marketing campaigns simultaneously, and from 1996 to 2006, it used at least six different slogans in quick succession. As a result of the transience of Slovenia’s brands, many Slovenian citizens and organizations continue to be skeptical of the national brand and its importance. This has, in part, led to a lack of coordination among the different groups that have a hand in marketing Slovenia. For example, in 2006 the Slovenian Tourist Board ran a series of advertisements on CNN Europe using the slogan, “Slovenia, a diversity to discover,” which was not used in any other marketing materials (Ruzzier and Petek, pp. 472–73). Even now, the 2012–2016 Slovenian Tourism Development Strategy
cites “inconsistent use of the national brand... in promotional activities on foreign markets” as one of its most major obstacles (Tomin Vučković, p. 32). Finally, and possibly underlying the previous issues of transience and inconsistency, even when Slovenia’s brands have been positively received abroad, they have generally failed to connect with people domestically. With one or two exceptions, Slovenian citizens have not felt that these brands have represented their country accurately. Encouragingly, this was addressed in the development of “I FEEL SLOVENIA,” with input and criticism from individuals, companies, and various government organizations playing a large part in the formulation of the brand. As such, “I FEEL SLOVENIA” has been received positively among Slovenians. Moving forward, the challenge will be convincing all organizations involved in promoting Slovenian tourism of the brand’s strength and achieving solidarity in the message they send both to Slovenian citizens and to the world (Ruzzier and Petek, p. 473–77).

Finally, one of Slovenia’s strengths could also be considered a weakness: its size. Its small size is highly advantageous for accessibility but, rather disadvantageously, it could also accentuate some of the negative effects of economic growth, which in turn could have a negative impact on tourism. Foremost among these negative effects is air pollution. Slovenia has the 6th smallest urban population in Europe (United Nations...) and, therefore, relies more heavily on automobiles for transportation than many other European countries. For example, Slovenia has the 12th highest road density in the world. Again, while convenient for reaching the more remote parts of the country, this pattern of travel has a negative impact on Slovenia’s scores in other areas. Slovenia is ranked 111th in carbon dioxide emissions per capita and 81st in the sustainability of its travel and tourism industry development (Blanke and Chiesa, p. 317). Alternative methods, outside of traditional fossil fuels, need to be utilized to fuel the future growth of Slovenia’s economy, including its tourism industry.

Opportunities

Although prices have been slowly climbing since the introduction of the euro, Slovenia is still competitively priced. Certain key products and services are significantly less expensive than in many other European destinations. Lonely Planet, the largest travel guide publisher in the world, included Slovenia in its “Best Value Destinations” article for 2013. It remarked that “Slovenia is as picture-perfect as Switzerland or other Alpine areas to the north, but much smaller and easier on the wallet. Small distances keep travel costs down, and buses radiating out of Ljubljana are plentiful and inexpensive...and anyone arriving from Austria or Italy will notice the difference in hotel prices at all budgets” (“Best Value Destinations”). Meals and other incidental costs typically range between €30 and €100 per day, depending on how much one wants to splurge, with the countryside generally costing less than the cities (“Money & Costs”). As mentioned, the primary factor in this is the price of lodging; at an average of $105 per night, the price of hotel rooms in Slovenia is appreciably smaller than in neighboring Austria, Croatia, and Italy, which average $130, $136, and $177 per night, respectively. The difference is especially striking when viewing Slovenia as a ski destination, which is a popular reason to travel there. Lodging is far less expensive in Slovenia than in traditional locations like France and Switzerland, where hotels average well over $200 per night (Blanke and Chiesa, p. 440). Air travel to Slovenia, while limited in volume, is also very well priced. For example, a couple in London looking to get away for a weekend can fly round trip to Ljubljana for as little as $130 per person (EasyJet). This reputation as an inexpensive alternative to the standard European tourist destinations will in the short term greatly assist Slovenia in its efforts to increase its visibility on the global scene.

In a similarly immediate way, the sluggish global economy also benefits Slovenian tourism by changing the way in which consumers are searching for vacations. Because of monetary constraints and an increased emphasis on finding value, individuals and families planning vacations are spending longer amounts of time searching

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3As measured by kilometers of road per 100 square kilometers of land.
for and comparing potential destinations (Tomin Vučković, p. 20). This is clearly an advantage for Slovenia. If consumers are now conducting a more exhaustive search of the available vacation options in the attempt to find a better deal, they are more likely to take a good look at smaller countries like Slovenia and, consequently, find that they have much to offer.

**Threats**

On the flip side of the coin, Slovenia’s biggest obstacle moving forward is a widespread lack of public awareness. Changing search patterns may serve to ameliorate this slightly, but this trend alone will only be a drop in the proverbial bucket. Real change will require the continued efforts of Slovenia to capitalize on this trend and on others (as described previously). As a young country with a small population, small land area, and no large cities, Slovenia is still unfamiliar to many Europeans and virtually unknown in America. Even more unfortunately, among those who can point to it on a map, it is commonly misperceived. Because it does not readily spring to mind, people tend to assume that there must be a reason it does not spring to mind. In the U.K., for example, many people assume that it is because there is a lack of things to do in Slovenia or because there is a language barrier (Caputo). In reality, exactly the opposite is true. It is in Slovenia’s best interest to address these sorts of misconceptions in its promotional efforts and outreach efforts in the future.

There is also a lingering stigma associated with post-communist Balkan and Eastern European countries, of which Slovenia is commonly viewed, inaccurately, to be a part. People unfamiliar with the region often believe that as a former communist country Slovenia must be underdeveloped, impoverished, and bleak and are surprised when encountering its stately homes, clean streets, friendly people, and lush greenery (Onić). Dating back to Slovenia’s earliest branding campaigns in the 1990s, which attempted to distance it from the Balkans and identify it more with central Europe, the country has been actively combating these negative stereotypes (Ruzzier and Petek, p. 472). The “I FEEL SLOVENIA” brand, with its strong communication of the color green, could prove an effective tool in this endeavor if executed smartly. It is a tall order—stereotypes are hard to change.

As discussed previously, prices in Slovenia are relatively low compared with those in surrounding central European countries, and there are a variety of outdoor and other activities available that do not require tourists to spend a lot of money. Although in the short term, this product mix presents a way to compete with the more established European tourism destinations, if left unbalanced, in the long term, it could pose some significant problems. As a rule, people tend to associate both price and brand strength with quality (Rao and Monroe, p. 351). Especially in the absence of a strong brand name, Slovenia does not want to earn the reputation of being merely a budget destination, secondary in quality to more expensive, more renowned destinations. Aside from an intangible reputation, leaving this product mix unaltered would have a tangible impact on tourism revenue. Higher visitor spending has an immediate impact on local economies. If a majority of tourists visit Slovenia with the intention of being frugal, this impact will be suboptimal. Slovenia must walk a tight rope: it must attract more visitors with competitive prices but simultaneously continue to develop more high value-added offerings in order to carve a niche for itself as a premier European destination (Tomin Vučković, p. 36).

**Going Forward**

The largest challenge for Slovenia to manage is the lack of common knowledge and consequential misconceptions. At the most general level, I believe Slovenia needs to position itself as a niche, luxury tourist destination through a long-term, two-step positioning process. First, Slovenia must build its brand equity through strong promotional campaigns in key target markets, such as the United Kingdom and Germany. Through the use of the color green, the “I FEEL SLOVENIA” brand, and other messages consistent with this image, these campaigns should educate people on what there is to see and do, how convenient Slovenia is, and how inexpensive it can be. If executed effectively, such campaigns should build demand for Slovenian tourism. Then, by simultaneously
developing and growing luxury, high value-added offerings, Slovenia would be able to capitalize on this increase in demand. The number of visitors would not grow beyond a level that Slovenia, as a small country, can handle, but the economic impact of tourism would still be able to grow.

**Strategies to Build Awareness and Demand**

No matter what specific promotional measures Slovenia chooses to take, all must be unified in their theme and mutually supportive in their respective informational contents. Slovenia has struggled with this in the past, but with the ongoing implementation of the 2012–2016 Slovenian Tourism Development Strategy, the Slovenian Tourist Board has wisely made consistency a top priority. Its strategy also emphasizes the need for a highly targeted approach. In it, the board states, “Tourism products need to be clearly positioned, and intensively and efficiently marketed on individual markets... through activities of digital marketing and the integration of e-marketing and classic marketing” (Tomin Vučković, p. 13).

These goals have already begun to have an impact, especially in the sphere of online marketing. In November of 2013, Slovenia ran a series of advertisements on the popular video-sharing website, YouTube. It included both masthead advertisements on the YouTube homepage and pre-roll advertisements (which play before the start of the user-desired video) for viewers in the key source markets of England, Germany, Austria, and Italy (SPIRIT Slovenia). Slovenia also ran a successful advertising campaign on Twitter in December of 2013, interacting with users to promote the country as a winter destination. Over the course of 20 days, the campaign generated 1,500 tweets and reached more than 400,000 Twitter users (aboutTourism). Even after the end of these specific campaigns, Slovenia has continued to utilize these websites effectively. Its upcoming campaign, dubbed “Stories in Slovenian Tourism,” will consist of promotions containing first-person storytelling designed to present Slovenia as a “green, active, healthy destination,” and to create “tourist products of a higher added value” (“Slovenian...Storytelling Marketing”). All of these promotional campaigns represent excellent first steps by Slovenia in its quest to create a distinctive name for itself in key source markets, and I believe it should continue to make these campaigns a priority.

In addition to targeting source markets by geographic location, Slovenia must actively target source markets by their areas of interest. The Slovenian Tourist Board identifies several offerings of particular importance in its Tourism Development Strategy. Of these, I believe hiking and biking tourism and business tourism have the most potential. This combination of offerings targets two distinct groups of consumers: younger active tourists and corporate business travelers. The former group fits with the image of a healthy, active, green Slovenia in fairly obvious ways. Slovenia already has much to offer them, including 10,000 km of hiking trails; 8,000 km of bike trails; more than 175 alpine cottages; and 72 specialized lodges for hikers and cyclists. In order to achieve the stated goal of 5 percent annual growth, Slovenia must be selective in the allocation of its limited resources for promoting these offerings, focusing on publications, periodicals, websites, and other media that specifically target people with these interests (Tomin Vučković, p. 48). On the other hand, although business tourism may initially seem like a less intuitive fit with Slovenia’s new image, on further review it integrates well. By attracting professionals with new ideas, technology, and business connections, business tourism significantly contributes to the broader growth of the economy as a whole (Lupson, pp. 56–57). In this way, Slovenia can develop a healthy, active, and green business environment to reflect these same qualities in its natural environment.

While I believe the majority of Slovenia’s promotional efforts should be targeted on nature, Slovenia might also consider investing further in a handful of other, non-traditional methods of building more broad-based awareness, which would lend additional support to its more targeted measures. One example of such a method that Slovenia could pursue is to promote itself as a destination for the filming...
of movies and television shows. Film-induced tourism is becoming an increasingly popular way in which certain areas are attracting foreign visitors and has been incredibly successful in areas of the U.K., Greece, and Turkey, among others. Generally, a movie familiarizes viewers with its setting in a positive way; serving as the setting of a popular movie provides a location with an additional selling point (Tuclea and Nistoreanu, pp. 28–29). The homepage of New Zealand’s tourism website, for example, currently highlights locations within the country used in the 2013 blockbuster, “The Hobbit.” The homepage even sports the tagline “Explore the real Middle-Earth” (New Zealand Tourism). Beneficially for Slovenia, central Europe has long been a popular location for filming. This region is generally less expensive than filming in the United States or Western Europe and offers a wide array of cities and landscapes in a relatively compact area. Scores of blockbuster films have been filmed in Hungary and the Czech Republic; but Slovenia, despite its geographic resemblance to popular filming locations, such as New Zealand, has not attracted much business of this sort. Interestingly, however, Slovenia is most likely about to take a major step toward changing that. It recently established the Slovenian Film Commission, tasked with promoting Slovenia as a filming destination. Additionally, Slovenia will most likely soon be offering a 20 percent cash rebate on all eligible film production spending within the country, with a minimum budget of €200,000 and up to €2 million (“Filming...”). It is a small but creative and intelligent first step that would simultaneously address Slovenia’s tourism weaknesses and threats. Increasing its presence on the silver screen would allow Slovenia to showcase its stunning landscapes and historic towns in an attention-grabbing, high-profile way, providing crucial support to Slovenia’s current branding efforts and shining a positive spotlight on this little-known country.

A Focus on Environment and Sustainability

The central focus of Slovenia’s planned promotional efforts over the next few years is the country’s natural environment. In addition to changing the public perception of Slovenia, there are a host of additional benefits to emphasizing environmentally friendly development. “Green tourism” is a rapidly growing segment of the global travel and tourism market, and even those who do not travel for expressly “green” reasons still often take environmental responsibility into account when making travel decisions. In one revealing survey conducted by the United Kingdom’s Devon County Council, 54 percent of people reported that environmental issues are a factor in their travel decision-making process, 82 percent said they are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products and services, and 72 percent believed that an environmentally conscious business is likely to be more focused on quality than one that is not. Furthermore, some of the world’s largest tour operators, such as TUI and Thomas Cook Group, have started preferential booking with green-minded destinations (Ringbeck). Slovenia has recognized this trend. In the 2012–2016 Slovenian Tourism Development Strategy, the Slovenian Tourist Board declares: “In 2016, tourism in Slovenia will be based on sustainable development and will, as a very successful industry of the national economy, importantly contribute to our country’s social welfare and reputation in the world” (Tomin Vučkovič, p. 36). Some of the ways in which Slovenia hopes to achieve this are by focusing on green construction in the accommodations sector, setting up more local chains of food supply, and obtaining international eco-certifications. The Tourism Development Plan also states that the country will “endeavour to increase the energy consumption from renewable sources, water use and sustainably produced food, reduce the CO₂ emissions, introduce sustainable waste management, and encourage the sales of souvenirs that are not made of endangered animal and plant species” (Tomin Vučkovič, p. 39). If specific plans along these lines are implemented and managed well, Slovenia will be in a great position to grow its green tourism business and ensure a sustainable future for its tourism industry as a whole.

The task of repositioning Slovenia as a

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5For the purposes of this article, I define green tourism as any non-environmentally harmful tourism for which the primary purpose of the visit is to partake in outdoor activities, observe flora or fauna, or improve the environment of the destination in some way.
green, high value-added tourist destination may seem daunting at first, but in time I believe Slovenians would find the process to be highly rewarding. Being viewed in this way by the international community would likely be an additional source of national pride for Slovenians, allowing the country to share its pre-existing green, healthy, and optimistic self-image with visitors from around the world. So while the challenges to becoming more environmentally friendly are significant, the reward to both the Slovenian tourism industry and society at large would be enormous.

Conclusion

Slovenia has some unique challenges on its quest for continued growth in its tourism industry but some unique opportunities as well. Judging by the headlines in the newspapers about all of Slovenia’s political stagnation and economic strife, one might wonder whether the country will rise to the occasion or let this chance to grow its tourism industry slip away. At the end of the day, I believe Slovenia will succeed. The 2012–2016 Slovenian Tourism Development Strategy strikes an excellent balance between ambition and pragmatism and sets admirable goals for the near future. The challenge will be implementation. Through inter-ministerial and public-private cooperation, Slovenia must put its plan into motion and achieve the goals it has set for itself in an efficient manner. If it can do this, I believe the country will see many more years of strong tourism growth.
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