

Syllabus for the Summer School course:

Sustainable Tourism and Destination Branding

Course Overview

This 8-day intensive course at the Zagreb School of Economics and Management (ZSEM) offers international students a unique opportunity to explore how destinations can grow responsibly while creating strong, competitive brands. Combining academic lectures, industry engagement, and field experiences, the course dives into responsible tourism, cultural heritage, gastronomy and wine, and destination branding - all central to Croatia's global tourism success story.

Students will learn directly from ZSEM faculty, tourism experts, and business leaders, while visiting key tourism stakeholders such as tourist boards, hotels, and local attractions. Through hands-on workshops and group projects, participants will develop their own sustainable tourism concept or branding strategy, applying knowledge from class to real-world practice.

Course Duration and Structure

Duration: 2 weeks (8 teaching days)

Schedule: Week 1 – Tuesday–Friday; Week 2 – Monday–Thursday

Time: 3 hours per day (24 contact hours total)

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand how sustainability, culture, and branding intersect in tourism management;
2. Analyze destination strategies through real-world Croatian examples;
3. Apply business and marketing concepts to design authentic tourism experiences;
4. Evaluate tourism innovation, technology, and service excellence in destination development;
5. Develop a sustainable destination branding or product concept with a practical focus.

Lecturer

Dr.sc. Matea Hanžek holds a Ph.D. from the University of Brighton. She focuses her research on tourism, arts, culture and wine. With a background in heritage and cultural tourism management, she also aims to bridge research and implement visual arts into hospitality, through the “artification of hospitality” as a new frontier of sustainable cultural tourism as well as an extension and reflection of the brand's identity and ethos. Currently, apart from her role as a researcher and university lecturer at the ZSEM, Matea serves as an Individual Expert for the European Commission in the Together for EU Tourism (T4T) Expert Group. In this capacity, she supports the Transition pathway for tourism in its co-implementation phase to advance in the green and digital transition, and improve resilience of the tourism ecosystem. Prior to this, Matea has gained professional experience at renowned institutions such as the Horwath HTL consulting firm in London and the Corinthia Hotel London. She gained additional education from esteemed institutions including the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the BI Norwegian School of Management, the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC), and the University of Oxford. She continues to be actively engaged in various tourism projects.

Course Outline

Week 1: Understanding the Business of Sustainable Tourism

Day 1 – Tuesday: **Introduction to Croatian Tourism and Global Context**

Welcome and course briefing; Lecture on 'The Business of Tourism – Global Trends and the Croatian Success Story'; Guest speaker from the Croatian National Tourist Board; Understanding Zagreb as a destination brand.

Day 2 – Wednesday: **Responsible and Sustainable Destination Management**

Lecture on sustainability as strategy; Case discussion on Dubrovnik and overtourism; Visit to Zagreb Tourist Board – sustainable city initiatives and visitor management.

Day 3 – Thursday: **Cultural Heritage and Experience Design**

Lecture on turning culture into experience; Visit to Museum of Broken Relationships – emotional branding and cultural innovation; Workshop on designing heritage-based experiences.

Day 4 – Friday: **Gastronomy, Wine, and Experiential Branding**

Lecture on food, wine, and tourism; Visiting lecturer from Zagreb County Winery – the business of enotourism; Group reflection on gastronomy as a component of destination identity.

Week 2: Branding, Innovation and Strategy

Day 5 – Monday: **Hospitality Management and Service Excellence**

Lecture on guest experience as brand value; Visit to 5*Esplanade Zagreb Hotel – management insights; Discussion on linking service excellence to destination reputation.

Day 6 – Tuesday: **Destination Branding and Marketing Strategy**

Lecture on 'Building the Brand – Croatia Full of Life'; Lecture on Storytelling; Workshop on developing a sustainable brand identity.

Day 7 – Wednesday: **Digitalization and Smart Destinations**

Lecture on innovation and technology in tourism; Workshop on digital storytelling and social media branding.

Day 8 – Thursday: **Group Presentations and Course Wrap-Up**

Student presentations of sustainable tourism projects; Panel feedback from faculty; Closing ceremony and certificates.

Assessment

- Class participation and engagement - 30%
- Group project (concept and presentation) - 50%
- Reflection paper or short essay - 20%

Field Visits & Industry Partners

- Croatian National Tourist Board
- Museum of Broken Relationships
- 5* Hotel Esplanade Zagreb
- Local Winery guest lecturer
- Zagreb Tourist Board

Why Join This Program

This course offers a powerful blend of academic learning, professional exposure, and cultural immersion. Students will gain practical insights into how destinations manage growth responsibly, create strong brand identities, and integrate local culture and gastronomy into the visitor experience. Whether pursuing a career in tourism, marketing, or international business, this program offers strategic, real-world insights set against the vibrant backdrop of Croatia.