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Croatian tourism: 1st 5-star boutique hotel opens in Pula, Istria

Pula - Croatia's luxury tourism market is growing and will soon be added to with the first 5-star small boutique hotel in Istria. After the interruption to Croatian tourism caused by the regional conflict 20 years ago, tourism is once more booming on the Adriatic coast, and the latest addition to the luxury scene is set to open in Pula on the Istrian Peninsula, and Digital Journal took a tour of Villa Vilun on May 4, 2014, of what will be the first 5-star private small boutique hotel in Istria.



The hotel's six gorgeous suites are a blend of Istrian tradition and modern convenience, and are the culmination of a 30-year project by owner Vaso Vulin.



"I was more than surprised when the inspectors came and awarded me five stars," he told Digital Journal over a glass of wine in his immaculate wine cellar. "They were here for eight hours going through pages of documentation. They made a few observations, then returned once more and awarded Villa Vilun 5 stars."



The Croatian categorisation system is complex and filled with regulations, and to achieve five stars is quite an achievement. Many foreign holiday home owners are left bemused by the requirements, which include such gems as fire-resistant ash trays.



The rise in boutique hotels is a welcome addition to the luxury end of the tourism market in Croatia. As the country develops its tourism, it is no secret that more quality hotels are required, and the opening of Villa Vulin will be one more step in the right direction.



Elsewhere in Croatia, there has been a growing trend of quality boutique hotels in historic location, of which perhaps the best example is Hotel Vestibul in the heart of Diocletian's Palace in Split, which was last year named in Fodor's Top 100 Hotels.



While the hotel aspect of Villa Vilun is new, a successful restaurant and wine cellar has operated on the premises for several years, serving traditional Istrian specialities.



This Digital Journalist was treated to a tour of the cellar; where a rather impressive Istrian prsut was waiting for tasting with a glass of wine, as Vaso Vulin sliced the ham himself.



The details of the cellar were certainly impressive, a blend of top international quality wines, such as Chateau Palmer 2006 from Bordeaux and a range of the finest Champagnes, to some real local specialities and rakijas.



Among them was the bukaleta, an ornamental and indigenous soup bowl which was designed for a particular dish — Istrian soup. A rather unusual dish, comprising local red Teran wine, sugar, olive oil and toasted bread.



With a swimming pool and fitness centre, Villa Vilun appears to be the complete package for those looking for a little luxury hideaway on the Istrian coast, and the hotel plans to open next month.



Its opening is the latest piece of good tourism news for the city of Pula, which is slowly transforming its image of an industrial and military city into one of the most innovative tourism destinations in Croatia. A key part of that strategy is blending heritage with new technologies, as Pula Mayor Boris Miletic explained to Digital Journal yesterday.



These include hosting ice hockey and concerts in Pula Arena, the sixth largest Roman amphitheatre in the worlds, music festivals in historic fortresses, and the latest event this evening called Lighting Giants, when the famous cranes of Uljanik shipyard will be transformed by a magical light show by internationally acclaimed light designer, Dean Skira, an event which will be covered by Digital Journal.

