



Many lessons to learn: Promoting Slovak tourism successfully



Marta Kučerová
CEO
Slovak Tourism Board

How would you evaluate the execution of your current marketing strategy in terms of goals reached by the end of 2013?

We are satisfied when it comes to the parameters specified in our strategy. In 2011 the number of domestic tourists increased by more than 2 percent and the number of foreign visitors rose by 10 percent, which exceeded our expectations by a factor of three. It remains to be seen after the summer season is over whether this trend will also be confirmed by the statistical data being collected, but feedback from hotel and restaurant owners is positive so far. Increasing the number of overnight stays and convincing tourists to prolong their stays in Slovakia remains a great challenge, though we see major potential there. We would certainly like to welcome more tourists from overseas, which naturally includes American visitors. Our marketing activities in overseas markets are coordinated with the other V4 (Visegrad Four) countries

AmCham had an opportunity recently to speak with Marta Kučerová, CEO of the Slovak Tourism Board (Slovenská agentúra pre cestovný ruch - SACR), about the Board's marketing strategy, their future goals, and their plans for promoting Slovakia.

(Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary). We understand that traveling to Europe from North America is demanding in terms of both time and money, so many tourists prefer to visit multiple destinations in one trip.

An amendment to the Act in Support of Tourism was recently adopted. Have you already seen benefits for domestic tourism in terms of new products, new attractions, or higher service quality in various regions?

The main purpose of the Act was to establish joint marketing, and those responsible for that work reacted immediately and established destination management associations. There are now more than 30 such groups across Slovakia. It is evident just from traveling around the country that the tourism business in many Slovak regions is gaining momentum. Business owners are realizing the importance of a pro-client orientation and are adjusting their offers accordingly. Since 2011 the Slovak Tourism Board has promoted Slovakia as a destination that offers a great deal of adventure tourism in addition to natural and historical sights. This added-value is an important part of the 10 percent increase in the number of foreign visitors.

What do you think could help to improve and promote regional and local tourism?

Entrepreneurs need to realize that competition in tourism does not work the same way it does in other business sectors. Local and regional tourism can only develop successfully if the individual subjects cooperate and offer attractive product packages at reasonable prices. Attractive product packages and reasonable prices are also one of the conditions of the Slovak Tourism Board for potential marketing cooperation.

The comedy-travel show *Vo štvorici po Slovensku* ("Four of Us Across Slovakia") was designed by the SACR to help develop regional tourism. It certainly represents the most ambitious project in Slovak tourism promotion in the past several years. The Slovak Tourism Board not only provided partial funding for the project, but also cooperated in writing and supervising the TV show. The feedback on the four comedians traveling across the country has exceeded the Board's expectations. Each of the destinations selected for the show cooperated enthusiastically as they understood the value of the advertising and the positive PR they would gain from the show. Each episode of the show has achieved a market share between 25 and 35 percent. Viewers have gotten used to the show very quickly and now eagerly look forward to the each new episode.

What are your plans to make Slovakia a more familiar country and a more visited destination?

We continually assess the success rate of various marketing campaigns and have initiated a discussion with the Ministry of Transport (which has tourism in its scope of responsibility) to create a strategy for tourism development by 2020. This strategy will basically follow-up on the existing positive trends and will support destination management.

One recent piece of success comes from the London Olympics. SACR helped to present Slovakia to tourists and promote the country at different levels. In addition to the standard tools, we created a number of interactive events. Publicity of these events suggests that they were very successful. In addition, the number of British citizens visiting Slovakia is rising, and individual discussions offer evidence that Slovakia is an ideal destination for Brits to make a short holiday in the current European economic conditions.

It is clear that the economic crisis will lead to a regrouping of forces and there will be new players in the tourism industry. We at SACR will do our best to make sure that Slovakia is among them.

The Slovak Tourism Board is an organization specialized in marketing and state promotion of tourism in the Slovak Republic that receives contributions from the state budget. It was established in 1995 by the Ministry of Economy. It markets tourism at the national level, provides information on travel opportunities in Slovakia, promotes Slovakia as a travel destination, contributes to the creation of a positive image of Slovakia abroad, and supports the sale of travel products from Slovakia. The SACR has been authorized to officially represent the country abroad and establish detached offices both at home and abroad.