



Croatia: Connected & Innovative

From Zadar Airport's smart urban planning to Velika Gorica's booming business zones & Zadar Airport's coastal connectivity, this corridor from capital to coast showcases Croatia's next wave of sustainable growth. With modern infrastructure, green initiatives & strategic locations, these hubs are redefining regional mobility, livability & investment appeal.

In collaboration with

Forbes



Central square blending civic life with historical legacy.

Zaprrešić: Investing in the Future

Zaprrešić is quietly living up to its motto: “Croatia’s most livable city.” Located just northwest of Zagreb and bordered by the Sava River, this mid-sized city has evolved far beyond its commuter-town origins. Its history stretches back thousands of years, from Neolithic flint tools to Roman routes, yet its identity today is defined by forward motion and urban strategy. Its location offers strategic access. Zaprrešić is linked to Zagreb via the A2 motorway and three railway stations, making it ideal for businesses that value regional connectivity. Infrastructure upgrades, including a new bypass and city-wide broadband expansion, have strengthened its role as a regional logistics and service

hub. Local authorities actively support small and medium-sized enterprises through mentoring, digital tools and tailored incentives. Startups can receive subsidies covering up to 75 percent of eligible costs, with €300,000 earmarked for new businesses. Grants of up to €10,000 are available to manufacturers investing in equipment, while digital service firms may access up to €4,000 for tech upgrades. The Falečnjak business zone comprises 244,000 square meters of land allocated by the Croatian government. It is being developed for production and high-tech industries, with more fully serviced land becoming available this year. Zaprrešić also stands out for its smart

infrastructure and environmental planning. Public services are increasingly digitized, including bill payment, school enrollment and communication with municipal offices through the city’s mobile app. The shift to smart systems includes sensor-monitored utilities, modernized intersections and automated waste collection. The city has also converted all public lighting to energy-saving LEDs and installed solar panels on multiple buildings, contributing to significant reductions in energy use. Quality of life remains a key advantage. As the population grows, investments in education and healthcare continue. A new kindergarten and expanded school capacity support younger residents, while the polytechnic and open university help develop a skilled workforce. Broadband connectivity and accessible services add to the convenience of daily life. Recreational areas reinforce livability. Lake Zajarki remains a favored destination for outdoor activities, while nearby wetlands promote biodiversity and educational tourism. Sports infrastructure is strong, including upgraded facilities and a modern bowling venue, supporting a local community of more than 3,000 active athletes. Cultural life is vibrant. Events like the Summer in Zaprrešić festival feature local food, crafts and performances. Visitors enjoy wines, štrukli, smoked meats and artisanal goods, along with concerts and open-air films. Blending heritage, innovation and sustainability, it is a place not just to live, but to grow and invest. ●



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Croatia’s Most Livable City

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Željko Turk: Leading with Vision



Novi Dvori: A rare blend of heritage, culture & natural beauty.

Can you briefly introduce Zaprrešić?

Zaprrešić is home to about 28,000 people, and sits just outside Zagreb. It’s well connected, with three train stations and quick access to major roads. Once mainly seen as a commuter town, Zaprrešić has grown into a lively, self-sufficient city that blends history with modern life. We’ve invested heavily in education, childcare, sports and local business infrastructure. A major development is the joint project between Končar and Siemens Energy, investing up to 200 million euros in a new facility within our economic zone, on state-granted land. With lower housing costs, walkable streets and reliable public services, Zaprrešić is becoming a place people actively choose to live.

How are you using tech & digital tools to improve public services?

Digital tools are part of daily life here. Our Moj Zaprrešić app keeps residents informed about services and events. Parents enroll their children in kin-



“With clear zoning, strong infrastructure & public support, we’re ready for serious investment.”

ŽELJKO TURK

Mayor, Zaprrešić



25 hectares

Allocated for new business development.

dergartens online, bills are paid digitally and citizens can easily reach city departments. We’ve added smart features too: like traffic light timers, video monitoring and digital parking control. Waste containers are underground and equipped with chips, covering more than 95 percent of the city. Our water and waste systems are connected to sensors, which helps us respond faster and operate more efficiently. It’s all about making everyday life smoother and more transparent for residents and businesses alike.

What green & sustainable projects are currently underway?

Sustainability is central to our work. We converted all public lighting to LED through the NEWLIGHT project, cutting energy use by 80 percent. We’ve built over 160 km of sewage pipelines, serving 13,000 homes, and added a recycling center and more green spaces. A 10.5 million euro geothermal energy study is underway, aiming to deliver clean, affordable heating. We’re also introducing seven electric buses for local transit, building more charging stations, and expanding cycling routes to better connect neighborhoods, business zones and train stations. Our goal is to lead by example when it comes to the green transition.

Where do you see the greatest potential for private investment?

We see strong potential in several areas. A new 50-hectare business zone will soon be fully developed and connected to key transport routes. It’s ideal for manufacturing, logistics or IT. West Gate Shopping City still has over 60 hectares of available land for commercial or mixed-use projects. We’re also supporting a 100-room hotel in the city center. With clear zoning, modern infrastructure and a supportive business climate, Zaprrešić is ready for long-term private and public-private investment. ●

Velika Gorica: Connected & Competitive

Just south of Zagreb, Velika Gorica is emerging as one of Croatia's most dynamic cities. As the regional capital of Turopolje, it is redefining what it means to grow sustainably. With over 60,000 residents, 3,000 businesses, and strategic access to Zagreb International Airport, the city combines quality of life with economic ambition. At its core, Velika Gorica is a city that invests in people. Fully subsidized kindergartens, scholarships for students in high-demand professions, and a robust local transport network make it a place where families not only stay but choose to settle. The city has abolished its local surtax and is reinvesting those savings into infrastructure, education and innovation. A €15 million geothermal energy project is now underway and will convert one of Croatia's most expensive heating systems into one of its most affordable. Nearly 10,000 public lighting units have been upgraded to LED, and solar panels now power most public buildings that meet structural standards. One of the country's most modern urban parks recently opened, and the city has planted Croatia's first public urban orchard, freely accessible to residents. Community and culture go hand in hand. Velika Gorica is home to over 7,600 registered athletes and 18 cultural societies. The city also funds a Center for Children, Youth and Families, offering free psychological and developmental support. Together, these initiatives have created



Meridian 16, a 108-hectare eco hub, drives Velika Gorica's growth.

an inclusive ecosystem that serves all generations. The city is also increasingly positioning itself as a regional tourism destination. Events such as Velikogoričke Večeri, Gastro Turopolja, and the RVG Show draw thousands each year. At the same time, the city is promoting its Turopolje heritage and aviation legacy to attract visitors from beyond the Zagreb day-trip market. Highlights include Lukavec Castle, the Turopolje Museum, and 50 kilometers of scenic cycling trails. Looking ahead, the city is preparing for even more. Construction is underway on a new Croatian Football Federation training complex, with tennis infrastructure also in development. Velika Gorica is advancing plans for a new day hospital, a

retirement center, and expanded school and kindergarten capacity. A revised urban plan will increase green space beyond the current 35 percent. Business momentum keeps building. All zones are active or expanding. The Kušanec zone is drawing strong investor interest, while Vukovinsko Polje should create 2,000 new jobs. With six highway access points and bypasses to divert heavy traffic from homes, the city offers great logistics without harming livability. Foreign investors also benefit from a personalized approach and direct access to city leaders. Velika Gorica isn't just growing, it's growing smart. With clear vision, strong leadership and a focus on quality of life, the city sets a new standard for sustainable urban development in Croatia. ●



Active tourism brings locals & tourists together.

Mayor Ačkar: Empowering People

Can you briefly introduce Velika Gorica & its role in the region?

Velika Gorica is the largest city in Zagreb County and the sixth-largest in Croatia. Long seen as a satellite of the capital, it has evolved into a thriving urban center with a strong economy, growing population and high quality of life. We offer free kindergartens, broad scholarship programs and support for families and key professions. Our strategic location near Zagreb, the international airport and key transport routes makes us a preferred base for major businesses such as Croatian Post, Atlantic Grupa and Croatia Control. People are not just passing through anymore; they're choosing to live and invest here.

How are you driving economic development & infrastructure upgrades?

Velika Gorica is among Croatia's top five cities by business revenues, with over 3,000 companies employing 23,000 people. All business zones are active or expanding, including the high-demand

Kušanec zone. We've invested in schools, kindergartens, a €15 million geothermal project, and free public transport linking all parts of the city. Vukovinsko Polje is set to add about 2,000 jobs. We've also launched a Competence Center for Industry 4.0 and a business incubator focused on IT, helping local talent grow and keeping the city attractive for investors at home and abroad.

What does sustainable development look like in the city?

We are committed to a green transition. Solar panels are installed on most public buildings, and nearly 10,000 streetlights now use LED technology. We've launched a major geothermal heating project, expanded green areas and opened Croatia's first urban orchard. We actively monitor and work to prevent illegal dumping, which contributes to low delinquency and high quality of life. We encourage sustainable mobility through new bike lanes and eco-friendly public transport options. Velika Gorica is growing, but never at the expense of its environment or social cohesion.

What role does culture, tourism & foreign investment play in your future plans?

Tourism is rising, thanks to events like Gastro Turopolja, the RVG Show, and one of Croatia's top-rated Advent festivals. Our heritage, lakes, bike paths and proximity to the airport position us well for broader appeal. For investors, especially from Germany and Austria, Velika Gorica offers ready infrastructure, easy access and a business-friendly climate. Our zones are located along bypass roads to protect residential life, and serious investors receive direct support from city leadership. We are strengthening promotion efforts and improving local amenities to attract more visitors year-round. We work closely with local communities too. We are ready to grow with partners who share our vision for sustainable, high-quality urban development. ●



"We're building a city where growth, quality of life & sustainability go hand in hand."

KREŠIMIR AČKAR

Mayor, Velika Gorica



€15M Geothermal Project

Turning heating costs into sustainable savings

Klišmanić: Expanding Capacity & Connections



Next-generation terminal designed for growth & sustainability.

How vital is Zadar Airport for local growth?

Zadar Airport plays a key role as the main entry point to northern Dalmatia and the Adriatic coast. Thanks to direct air connections, tourists can now reach Zadar from any major European city in just a couple of hours. This has changed the dynamic of tourism in our region. The season is no longer limited to a few peak weeks in summer but now starts as early as spring when the first summer flights begin. This steady flow of visitors supports local businesses, hotels, restaurants and the wider economy, creating jobs and encouraging new investments. It also helps local producers and event organizers benefit from increased visibility.

What fuels the airport's recent growth?

One of the biggest drivers is our long-standing partnership with Ryanair, which connects Zadar to 56 destinations across Europe. Germany is our strongest market, followed by Poland, Austria and the United Kingdom. Years ago, only a few

cities in Croatia had this reach, but today Zadar stands shoulder to shoulder with them as an important gateway. In 2022, we were ranked among the five fastest-growing airports in Europe in our category, and we continue to add new routes and expand seasonal services to meet rising demand. We are also investing in modern facilities, better passenger amenities and smoother connections to the city.

What upgrades are planned?

We have started expanding our passenger terminal to increase capacity and provide a higher level of comfort and service. This is only the first phase, as more extensions are already planned which will fully modernize the entire complex. At the same time, we are preparing upgrades for both runways so they can handle more flights and larger aircraft. We plan to extend the apron and build new hangars for aircraft maintenance. These investments will bring more jobs, attract additional business activities and strengthen Zadar's position as a transport center with strong road and future rail links. Our vision is to support more cargo traffic and advanced services, making the airport an engine of growth for the region.

How is sustainability shaping the airport?

We place great importance on operating responsibly and setting an example for green aviation. Our solar panels already power aircraft on the ground and help cut fuel use and emissions by nearly half. Future terminal expansions will be fitted with even more panels, so we can cover all our electricity needs. We have joined the European Alliance for Zero Emission Aviation and are exploring hydrogen and other cleaner energy solutions together with partners. We see the airport as more than just a transport hub. It is also a place where new technologies and ideas can drive economic growth while protecting the environment for future generations. ●



"Today you can reach Zadar from anywhere in Europe in just a few hours."

JOSIP KLIŠMANIĆ

General Manager, Zadar Airport



1 Million+ Passengers Annually

Record traffic growth



Ryanair connects Zadar Airport to over 50 European cities.

Zadar Airport: Croatia's Coastal Hub

Zadar Airport has emerged as one of Croatia's most dynamic regional airports, transforming how people reach northern Dalmatia and the wider Adriatic. Under the guidance of General Manager Josip Klišmanić, the airport has grown far beyond its seasonal roots, helping extend the tourist season and create steady

economic benefits for the entire region. Once reliant on long road trips and limited routes, Zadar is now linked to over 50 European cities, driven by a strategic partnership with Ryanair and supported by other major carriers like Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines. Germany remains the biggest source market, making up about 30 percent

of total passenger traffic. The airport now handles over one million passengers and ranks among Europe's fastest-growing. This success demands constant investment. Klišmanić and his team have started the first phase of a major terminal expansion that will increase capacity and raise service quality for every traveler, whether budget or premium. The airport's two runways and large development space give it a unique edge for growth. New hangars, expanded aprons and plans for long-haul connections show how Zadar aims to meet future demand without compromising comfort. For travelers, the airport remains the perfect starting point for exploring one of Europe's most stunning coastlines. With seven national parks within easy reach, historic streets and new five-star hotels opening, the region continues to attract visitors seeking both relaxation and adventure. Today, Zadar Airport stands as a symbol of what smart planning and strong partnerships can deliver: steady growth, new opportunity, and a clear path forward for Croatia's coastal gateway. ●

Stay Connected Your Gateway to Croatia's Coast



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This report was created by Elite Reports
for various editions of **Forbes**

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