

## **Cuisine and Culture in Montenegro and the United States of America**

### Abstract

The intersection of cuisine and culture has emerged recently as a subject of importance in a number of academic disciplines such as anthropology, geography, sociology and folklore. A salient thread occurring through the various approaches to this subject is the immense emotional significance food and food traditions have for individuals. By providing lectures in hotel and tourism management courses, I hope to enhance learning by furnishing knowledge from the cuisine of the United States.

### Proposed Start Date and Length of Grant

September 1, 2014 – April 15, 2015

### **Project Statement**

#### Why This Country?

My initial interest in submitting a proposal arose from the recommendation of a CIES program manager who indicated that I would be a good applicant for this culture, in part, because of my academic specialty, tourism, my interest in the intersection of food and culture, and my steadfast commitment to international education. Her recommendation sparked my interest, and I began reading about this small, interesting culture, Montenegro. From readings such as *The Realm of the Black Mountain* (Roberts, 2007), I learned that despite the fact that Montenegro recently re-emerged as a nation state in 2006, it has cultural and historic roots extending to the prehistoric settlement of Illyrian tribes. Since that era, Montenegrins have asserted their identities despite their position on social, historical, religious and geological fault lines. Poised between Ancient Greeks and Romans, cross and crescent, Catholic and Orthodox and Muslim, Ottomans and Venetians, and major earthquakes, their rugged persistence evoked the words of the English poet Lord Alfred Tennyson.

They rose to where their eagle sails,  
They kept their faith, their freedom on the height,  
Chaste, frugal, savage, arm'd by day and night  
Against the Turk whose inroad nowhere scales...

It was into the discovery of this intriguing culture that I ventured. I contacted several faculty of the University of Montenegro including Andriela Vitic, Professor of Hotel and Tourism Management. She and I communicated via email and discussed a variety of ways by which we could collaborate. We agreed that I would visit her and the Kotor Campus.

I arrived for my visit on May 15. My initial encounter gave me the impression that this is a special place where a variety of tourist niches could exist—cultural/heritage, culinary, adventure and eco-tourism could all flourish in this environment. In addition, these and other tourism

niches could serve to bolster local economies while preserving and promoting the uniqueness of this culture.

Although the Montenegrins have been able to again assert their independence, there is, to echo words coined by Sherlock Holmes, a new game afoot. It is globalization. Even though Montenegro is relatively free of chain restaurants and hotels, I could not help but notice the small café situated near a hotel where I stayed in Montenegro with its large canopy advertising an American soft drink corporation, and a prominent poster of a hamburger on its wall. Is this a bode of things to come? Will the Montenegrins again soar to where their eagle sails?

In summary, my interest in serving as a Fulbright Fellow in Montenegro is based on multiple factors. After researching and visiting Montenegro, meeting with faculty at the University of Montenegro and lecturing students, I believe that this is a place where I can contribute to teaching hotel and tourism management. Moreover, my contribution to teaching and learning in this area will furnish Montenegrin students with examples drawn from American culture. It is also a place where I can learn about the food culture of Montenegro, and return to America armed with sufficient knowledge to create a course on the food culture of Montenegro and the Balkans. This will enable me to communicate knowledge about Montenegro to members of contemporary American society, thus enhancing cultural understanding between the two societies.

What experiences have prepared you to teach in this country?

My development through education, research and teaching has prepared me to teach hotel and tourism management students in Montenegro. I have over 10 years of experience teaching an undergraduate course, HTM 175 International Cuisine and Culture. During this period, I have taught over 1 thousand students about the cuisine and culture of Italy. One of the goals of this course is to foster intercultural understanding.

My teaching of HTM 175 has been augmented by nine years of experience co-directing our Department's study abroad program in northern Italy. Each year, I have co-led small groups of undergraduate students to a village located in a rural area of the Italian region of Piedmont. In doing so, I have facilitated over 200 learners as they have encountered a new culture through its food traditions.

My teaching of in hospitality & tourism management has been enriched by my training as a chef, an advanced degree in food service management and my employment in the field. I thus have technical and academic skills and knowledge as well as my experiences in international education that inform my teaching about food and culture.

My abilities to serve as a cultural ambassador have roots imbedded deep in my personal history. My early life occurred in a safe, homogenous community in the suburbs of Chicago. My life took a different direction, however, when I graduated from our parochial high school and enlisted in the United States Navy. After I completed training as a hospital corpsman and was stationed at the Navy hospital in Naples, Italy. This phase of my life was a significant source of change for me as I struggled to deal with life in the armed forces and life in a totally alien

culture. I survived and grew, but it was only years later that I was able to appreciate the cultural lessons I experienced over the course of my four-year enlistment that included travel to over 12 different countries. Through the years, the development of my cultural awareness has continued, and I have applied my lifelong experiences to the study abroad program that I co-direct. I firmly believe that my lifelong learning has equipped me to serve in Montenegro as a cultural ambassador and that my successful completion of a Fulbright program in Montenegro will prepare me to return as an ambassador of its culture in America.

What have you taught and how do you teach?

For over 10 years, I have taught a course on international cuisine and culture. I teach this course from the perspectives of a number of disciplines such as folklore, anthropology and history. I teach the same course as part of our study abroad program. Several years ago, I developed a distance learning section of the course.

My other teaching experiences include development of a course on culinary tourism. This course also has learning components that address the subject of cuisine and culture. Other courses I have taught include the introduction to Hospitality and tourism management, introduction to food and beverage management, international tourism, geotourism and an introduction to culinary management.

I approach the craft of teaching with the belief that a variety of tools are required in order to be a competent, reflective practitioner. I utilize a variety of teaching and learning activities including:

- Lecture
- Assigned reading
- Project-based learning
- Small group activities
- Individual and small group presentations
- Small group learning activities

I believe that these activities act in concert with each other.

What courses do you plan to teach?

When I consulted with Professor Andriela Vitic, we agreed that I would have the greatest impact by working as a guest lecturer in a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses. She and I agreed that I could provide knowledge to enhance learning in four specific courses. These include: Global Marketing, Understanding Consumer Behavior in Tourism, Nutrition and gastronomy.

I want to emphasize my flexibility in this important area, and that I will be willing to contribute in any way I can to the learning activities of each of these courses and others as directed by faculty and staff of the University of Montenegro. As a result of my conversations with faculty,

I would be prepared to deliver knowledge specific to each course that would enhance course content while providing learners with a context in American life that would add to their cultural understanding. This cultural understanding would be further augmented by my lectures conducted in English. With translation, learners would thus benefit from hearing the English language spoken by a person for whom English is his primary language. This process would also add to intercultural understanding.

I am eager to contribute to Montenegrin society through any teaching activities I am able to offer. One possible area of teaching would be lectures to the faculty of the University of Montenegro. I am also interested in teaching through the local tourism board. In particular, I believe that I can contribute through informal teaching about culinary and wine tourism as well as service points for dealing with American tourists. There is an area in the vicinity of Lake Skadar that produces white wines, cheeses and cured meats. This area also has a fresh water fishing industry. I believe that I could be of assistance in this region by helping to further organize wine and cheese trails. I could also help to brand this area as a destination for culinary tourists.

How will you adapt your materials to the culture and language of the host country?

It is difficult to answer this question because I will be assigned topics for my guest lectures. However, I plan to be able to draw from my understanding of Montenegrin culture as a way to ground my ideas in territory that is familiar to learners.

How will you adapt to a pedagogically different teaching environment in which the first language of the students may not be English?

My first and foremost undertaking has been to learn a great deal about Montenegrin culture and history. I also plan to begin to acquire some knowledge of the language.

What impact do you expect on your teaching and/or professional work?

I will be open to as many new learning experiences as possible. As such, it is impossible to predict some of the impact on my work. However, I expect to learn about Montenegrin food culture and to incorporate this knowledge into my work. The course I teach, HTM 175, would be an excellent way to teach about the food culture of the Balkans with a special emphasis on Montenegro. This course fulfills a general education requirement. As a result, I would be able to facilitate learning about this region with a wide variety of students.

How do you expect to use the experience upon your return?

I plan to initiate a proposal for an interdisciplinary honors course on Balkan culture with a special focus on Montenegro. I have already begun collaboration with Professor Vitic on an article on branding Cajun culture. I hope that this will be the beginning of an ongoing collaboration between me and the faculty of the University of Montenegro.