

CREAM OF Croatia

The rugged, cerulean-blue Dalmatian coastline, rustic local konoba tavernas and opulent Venetian palaces make Croatia one of Central Europe's most idyllic destinations. Dawn Gay goes in search of the past



Zagreb

Croatia's fashionable capital still holds onto yesterday's charm. Step onto the cobbled streets in the bohemian Gornji Grad upper town to see the majestic Zagreb Cathedral with its towering Gothic spires and bustling St Mark's Square with its photogenic 13th Century church.

Where to stay

For pure 1920's class, choose the Regent Esplanade Zagreb, where Woody Allen and Orson Welles have stayed in the lavish rooms.

www.theregentzagreb.com

Dubrovnik

A winding cliff top road, the E65, winds its way along the glistening Adriatic, past vineyards and pine-covered mountains to historic Dubrovnik. Here, the medieval city walls with their turrets and ramparts encircle the terracotta-roofed old city, like something from a Brothers Grimm fairytale. The city earned its nickname, 'the pearl of the Adriatic' when George Bernard Shaw strolled through the city's marble-paved alleyways and squares.

Where to stay

Positioned right in the heart of it all, in Gunduli Square, the Puci Palace is a boutique Baroque palace with its own private beach access.

www.thepucipalace.com

Split

The Roman Emperor, Diocletian chose the balmy, peninsula city of Spilt as the location to build his lavish retirement home. The marble and limestone walls of the UNESCO-protected palace have refused to crumble since the 4th Century AD and you can still wander through the well-preserved vestibules and temples around the complex.

Where to stay

Lodge right between the Roman city walls and Emperor's chambers in sumptuous boutique surroundings at Vestibul Palace.

www.vestibulpalace.com

Brac Island

This central Dalmatian island is home to one of the most-photographed natural phenomena in Croatia – the Zlatni Rat, or Golden Cape Beach at Bol. This 500-metre, finger-shaped sand bar morphs into shape with the tide, and provides the perfect suntrap for lazy days and water sports.

Where to stay

The Mediterranean-style retreat, Villa Bracka Perla sits in its own tranquil cove between the forest and the traditional fishing of Mirca on Brac.

Korcula

It's little wonder that the explorer Marco Polo made his home on the island of Korcula, surrounded by clear Adriatic waters and rolling olive groves. Hop off the ferry service from Drvenik to explore the old town's maze of narrow walkways and Renaissance chapels. You can stop for a glass of robust Posip wine in one of the many Venetian-style restaurant terraces with views over the dramatic Pelje ac Peninsula.

Where to stay

The swanky rooms are known as 'residences' at elegant Lesic Dimitri Palace, a former bishop's hideaway nestled in the old town.

www.lesic-dimitri.com **M**