

[travel]

MEDIEVAL MAGIC

BY GERRIE SUMMERS





CROATIA IS A FAST GROWING DESTINATION. THE COUNTRY HAS PICTURESQUE MEDIEVAL TOWNS RICH IN HISTORY AND CHARMING COUNTRYSIDE RICH IN CULTURE. THE POPULARITY OF THE HBO SERIES "GAME OF THRONES," WHICH FILMS IN LOCATIONS IN CROATIA, HASN'T HURT.

"Croatia, like most of the Balkans and broader Eastern Europe, is a massive draw for visitors to Europe – and increasingly so," says John Boulding, CEO of Insight Vacations, a luxury tour company that took this writer and others through sites in Croatia via customized coach.

"There are the stunning landscapes such as the Dinaric Alps, Plitvice Lakes [National Park] and the Dalmatian coastline; the poignancy of its war-torn history, including the terrible conflicts just 20 years ago; and the folklore and colorful traditions that still linger as part of the daily life."

Left: A view of Dubrovnik and its ancient walled city. Above left: A serene night scene in Split. Photo credits: Ivo Pervan/Courtesy of the Croatian National Tourism Organization. Above right: Charcoal Island boasts a medieval walled city and secluded beaches and bays. Photo credit: Josip Madracevic/Courtesy of the Croatian National Tourism Organization.

A modern sidewalk restaurant amid the “old town” buildings in Split. **Opposite page top** : An oyster farm in Ston. **Inset**: A narrow stone-paved passageway in Korcula. Photo credit: Gerrie Summers.



TIP » CLIMB FOR VIEWS OVER THE FORTIFIED CITY.
STAY » ATRIUM HOTEL SPLIT. (★★★★★ STAR) Hotel-Atrium.hr.

📍 SPLIT: A PALATIAL CITY

My journey began in the ancient port city of Split. At first glance, Split looks like a typical modern, cosmopolitan city. Bustling cafes sit along the palm tree-lined Riva Waterfront Promenade that overlooks a harbor dotted with sailboats, ferries and yachts. The promenade also borders Diocletian's Palace, built as the retirement home of Roman Emperor Diocletian and considered one of the greatest Roman ruins in western Europe. The huge palace complex is now the heart of the city. Ancient grounds and courtyards house shops, cafes, restaurants and homes along a maze of narrow streets. The palace mausoleum was used to construct Cathedral St. Dominius. It has a steep bell tower.



» THE WALLS OF STON

Our trip continues toward Ston. Ston's economic importance to Dubrovnik as a salt producing town, led to the building of the "Great Wall of Croatia," one of the longest fortifications in Europe. The wall extends to Mali Ston, the smaller sister village and harbor. Both villages are culinary destinations, famous for oysters and mussels since Roman times. After a visit to an oyster farm and a taste of the fresh delicacy, lunch was served at Bota-Sare. Located in an old castle, this restaurant serves oysters, shellfish and other seafood made using original local recipes.



« MARCO... POLO! IS KORCULA WHERE A LEGEND WAS BORN?

At Orebic we set sail for the town of Korcula on the island of the same name. Korcula Old Town is another medieval walled city with beautiful churches and palaces and many examples of Venetian Renaissance architecture. Like the rest of Dalmatia, it has been under the rule of several empires, Venetian influences dominate, including the walls constructed to protect the town against the Turks and pirates. According to some historians, Korcula is the actual birthplace of explorer Marco Polo. You can see the ruins of his house. You might also witness the 16th century Moreska sword dance. At one time it was performed all over the Mediterranean and now can only be seen in Korcula.

TIP » FOR LUNCH OR DINNER TRY RESTAURANT FILIPPI FOR MODERN DALMATIAN CUISINE.

STAY » HOTEL MARKO POLO. (★★★★ STAR) *Korcula-Hotels.com*.



«DUBROVNIK: PEARL OF THE ADRIATIC

After visiting a local winery, we were off to the “Pearl of the Adriatic.” George Bernard Shaw called Dubrovnik “heaven on earth.” Dubrovnik is stunning. Baroque houses with reddish-orange tiled rooftops are encircled by white stone defensive walls that are striking against an azure sky and sea. ■

GOOD TO KNOW

» The currency in Croatia is the kuna. ATMs are readily available. Credit cards are widely accepted.

» When planning your trip, think weather. The Adriatic coast has a mild Mediterranean climate. April was a pleasant time to visit. During July and August it is hot and crowded.

» Buses or cars are a great way to see the countryside. Main roads are fine, but there are some tricky areas along the coastal routes and Croatians are known to be aggressive drivers.

» The towns are great for wandering. Get guided tours if you want history, local culture, little known facts, interesting legends and narratives.

For further information, go to Croatian Tourism Board at Croatia.hr; Insight Vacations, InsightVacations.com

**AT PRESS TIME:
OFFICIAL QUOTE FROM THE
CROATIAN TOURISM BOARD:**

“Croatia is currently facing a significant wave of refugees that has overwhelmed countries across Europe in recent weeks. For the refugees who are arriving in Croatia, organised accommodation at seven different locations within the country is being provided. Therefore, in Croatian cities including Zagreb, tourist resorts and Croatian tourist destinations will continue to function as normal. We are aware, however, that some border crossings may be delayed or limited due to the continued efforts to manage the situation.”

*A view of the turquoise sea and the city of Dubrovnik.
Photo credit: Gerrie Summers.*

TIP » STROLL ALONG THE ANCIENT CITY WALLS. VISIT SITES LIKE SPONZA PALACE, RECTOR'S PALACE, A 1317 EUROPEAN PHARMACY, FRANCISCAN AND DOMINICAN MONASTERIES. **STAY** » DUBROVNIK PALACE HOTEL (★★★★★ STAR) AdriaticLuxuryHotels.com.

» Gerrie Summers is a travel, beauty and lifestyle writer based in New York.