

ROUGH GUIDES



THE ROUGH GUIDE to

Croatia





About this book

Rough Guides are designed to be good to read and easy to use. The book is divided into the following sections and you should be able to find whatever you need in one of them.

The **colour section** gives you a feel for Croatia, suggesting when to go and what not to miss, and includes a full list of **contents**. Then comes **basics**, for pre-departure information and other practicalities.

The **guide** chapters cover Croatia's regions in depth, each starting with a highlights panel, introduction and a map to help you plan your route.

The **contexts** section fills you in on history, folk and rock music and books, while individual **colour inserts** introduce the country's islands and cuisine, and **language** gives you an extensive menu reader and enough Croatian to get by.

The book concludes with all the **small print**, including details of how to send in updates and corrections, and a comprehensive **index**.

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The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in *The Rough Guide to Croatia*, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

The **Rough Guide** to

Croatia



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Introduction to Croatia

Despite being one of Europe's hit holiday destinations, Croatia doesn't feel like a place that has been thoroughly worked over by the tourist industry. Though development continues apace along the more commercialized stretches of the coast, Croatian tourism has spun off in a number of positive directions. The infrastructure for hikers and cyclists is blossoming and rural tourism is on the rise. As well, a renewed respect for natural ingredients has become the watchword of Croatian cuisine, with locally sourced foodstuffs, wines and olive oils standing up increasingly well to globalization. On the cultural front, a spate of summer festivals has placed Croatia firmly on the European rock and pop circuit, while a raft of new galleries and art attractions has given the country a cool and contemporary sheen.



Croatia is blessed with a wealth of natural riches, boasting almost 2000km of rocky, indented shore and more than a thousand islands, many blanketed in luxuriant vegetation. Even during the heavily visited months of July and August there are still enough off-the-beaten-track islands, quiet coves and stone-built fishing villages to make you feel as if you're visiting Europe at its most unspoilt. There's plenty in the way of urbane glamour too if that's what you're after, with swanky spa hotels, yacht-filled harbours and cocktail bars aplenty – especially in à-la-mode destinations such as Dubrovnik and Hvar. Wherever you go you'll find that Croatia retains the kind of easy-going informality that's in short supply elsewhere in the Mediterranean.



Most budget and mid-range accommodation is still in the form of private rooms and apartments, and there has been an explosion in the number of backpacker-friendly hostel-type establishments in the major cities.

The country has certainly come a long way since the early 1990s, when within the space of half a decade – almost uniquely in contemporary Europe – it experienced the collapse of communism, a war of national survival and the securing of **independence**. Croatia is now once again an optimistic, welcoming and safe destination, and visitors will be struck by the tangible sense of pride that independent statehood has brought. National culture is a far from one-dimensional affair, however, and much of the country's individuality is due to its geographical position straddling the point at which the sober central-European virtues of

Fact file

- Croatia (**Hrvatska** in Croatian) is a crescent-shaped country of 4.5 million people. Roughly 85 percent of the population are **Croats**, who speak a Slavic language akin to Serbian and Bosnian, and practise the **Catholic Christian** faith. There is also a sizeable **Serbian** population (about thirteen percent of the total), who belong to the **Orthodox Church** and are concentrated along Croatia's borders with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.
- Croatia is a **parliamentary democracy** with a directly elected – though nowadays largely ceremonial – president as head of state. The Croatian parliament, the **Sabor**, is made up of two houses – the 151-member Zastupnički dom (House of Representatives), from which the prime minister and most of his cabinet are usually chosen; and the 68-member Županijski dom (House of Regional Representatives).
- **Tourism** is Croatia's most important industry and is increasingly seen as the cash cow that will support all other branches of the economy. The prime exports are textiles, pharmaceuticals and agricultural products. Croatia's heavy industries have not found the transition from state ownership to a market economy easy. Shipbuilding, which was one of Croatia's prime earners in the 1970s and 1980s, almost totally collapsed in the 1990s.

Top five summer festivals

Motovun Film Festival

(see p.192). A leading international section of art-film new releases, screened in the open air to a hedonistically inclined crowd.

Split Summer Festival

(see p.328). Both Dubrovnik and Rijeka offer prestigious summer seasons of classical music and drama, although neither can match Split in terms of popular appeal and high-brow content.

Garden Festival Petrčane (see p.280). A ten-day-long DJ-powered beach party takes over the compact seaside resort north of Zadar.

In-music Festival Zagreb (see p.99). Classic pop-and-rock weekender on the outskirts of Zagreb, attracting an increasingly impressive roster of big names.

Hartera Festival Rijeka (see p.212). A more alternative take on the rock-and-pop theme, with a grand nineteenth-century industrial complex providing the setting.



hard work and order collide with the spontaneity, vivacity and taste for the good things in life that characterizes the countries of southern Europe – a cultural blend of **Mittleuropa** and **Mediterranean** that gives Croatia



▲ Celebrating in Zagreb

its particular flavour. Not only that, but the country also stands on one of the great faultlines of European civilization, the point at which the Catholicism of Central Europe meets the Islam and Orthodox Christianity of the East. Though Croats traditionally see themselves as a Western people, distinct from the other South Slavs who made up the former state of Yugoslavia, many of the hallmarks of Balkan culture – patriarchal families, hospitality towards strangers and a fondness for grilled food – are as common in Croatia as in any other part of southeastern Europe, suggesting that the country's relationship with its neighbours is more complex than many Croats will admit.

Where to go

Croatia's underrated capital **Zagreb** is a typical Central European metropolis, combining elegant nineteenth-century buildings with plenty of cultural diversions and a vibrant café life. It's also a good base for trips to the undulating hills and charming villages of the rural **Zagorje** and **Žumberak** regions to the north and west, and to the well-preserved Baroque town of **Varaždin** to the northeast.

The rest of **inland Croatia** provides plenty of opportunities for relaxed exploring. Stretching east from Zagreb, the plains of **Slavonia** form the richest agricultural parts of Croatia, with seemingly endless corn and sunflower fields fanning out from handsome, Habsburg-era provincial towns such as **Osijek** and **Vukovar** – although the latter was almost totally destroyed in a notoriously bitter siege during the 1991–95 war and will take time to rebuild. Inland Croatia also offers numerous **hiking** opportunities: **Mount Medvednica**, just above Zagreb, or the **Samoborsko gorje** just to the west of the capital are good for gentle rambling, while the mountains of the **Gorski kotar** between Zagreb and the sea offer more scope for strenuous hikes. Also lying between Zagreb and the coast, and easily visited from either, are the deservedly hyped **Plitvice Lakes**, an enchanting sequence of forest-fringed turquoise pools linked by miniature waterfalls.

Croatia's lengthy stretch of coastline, together with its islands, is big enough to swallow up any number of tourists. At the northern end, the

▲ Countryside in the Zagorje



Club culture

Combining central-European artiness, Mediterranean style, and anarchic Balkan unpredictability, Croatia's club scene is currently the most vibrant in southeastern Europe. Zagreb is the year-round focus of activity, offering everything from mainstream weekend partying to off-the-wall underground happenings of a chin-stroking nature. Long-established venues like cutting-edge DJ temple *Aquarius*, live rock and jazz club *KSET*, and alternative-music mecca *Močvara*, are regular stopoffs for international performers.

Encouraged by the boom in Adriatic tourism, Zagreb's club culture is migrating to the coast in a big way. Several DJ bars set up summer camp on Zrće beach on the island of Pag, creating an easygoing, hype-free Adriatic alternative to Ibiza. Elsewhere, dance clubs up and down the coast are hosting the kind of international DJs who wouldn't have been able to find Croatia on a map until a few years ago.

peninsula of **Istria** contains many of the country's most developed resorts, along with old Venetian towns like **Poreč** and **Rovinj**, rubbing shoulders with the raffish port of **Pula**, home to some impressive Roman remains. Inland Istria is characterized by sleepy hilltop villages, often dramatically situated, such as **Motovun**, **Grožnjan**, **Roč** and **Hum** – each mixing medieval architecture with rustic tranquillity.

The island-scattered **Kvarner Gulf**, immediately south of Istria, is presided over by the city of **Rijeka**, a hard-edged industrial centre and the Adriatic's most important transport hub. Close by are a clutch of resorts that were chic high-society hangouts in the late nineteenth century and retain a smattering of *belle époque* charm: quaint, diminutive **Lovran**, and the larger, more developed **Opatija** and **Crikvenica**. Not far offshore, the Kvarner islands of **Cres**, **Lošinj** and **Krk** have long been colonized by the package-holiday crowds, although each has retained its fair share of quiet seaside villages and tranquil coves; while the capital of **Rab**, south of Krk, is arguably the best-preserved medieval town in the northern Adriatic.

Beyond the Kvarner Gulf lies **Dalmatia**, a dramatic, mountain-fringed stretch of coastline studded with islands. It's a stark, arid region where fishing villages and historic towns cling to a narrow coastal strip rich in figs, olives and subtropical vegetation. Northern Dalmatia's main city is **Zadar**, whose busy central alleys are crammed with medieval churches. From here, ferries serve a chain of laid-back islands such as **Silba**, **Ugljan**, **Pašman** and the ruggedly beautiful **Dugi otok** – none of them sees many package tourists, and they're enticingly relaxing as a result. Despite being the site of an unmissable Renaissance cathedral, middle Dalmatia's main town,

Šibenik, is the least compelling of the region's urban centres, but makes a good staging-post en route to the waterfalls of the **River Krka** just inland, and the awesome, bare islands of the **Kornati archipelago**.

Croatia's second city, **Split**, is southern Dalmatia's main town, a vibrant and chaotic port with an ancient centre moulded around the palace of the Roman emperor, Diocletian. It's also the obvious jumping-off point for some of the most enchanting of Croatia's islands. The closest of these to the city is **Brač**, where you'll find lively fishing villages and some excellent beaches, while nearby **Hvar** and **Korčula** feature smallish towns brimming

with Venetian architecture and numerous beaches. Slightly further afield, the islands of **Vis** and **Lastovo**, which were closed to tourists until the late 1980s, remain particularly pristine.

South of Split lies the walled medieval city of **Dubrovnik**, site of an important arts festival in the summer and a magical place to be whatever the season. Much of the damage inflicted on the town during the 1991–95 war has been



▲ Dominican monastery, Dubrovnik

▲ Cafés in Rovinj



National parks

If an unending display of natural riches is what you're after, then Croatia certainly offers variety, with stark mountains, forest-cloaked islands, and wildfowl-infested wetlands all vying for your attention. Several unique locations enjoy national park protection: most celebrated of these is **Plitvice**, a descending sequence of clear blue lakes punctuated by a stunning series of terraced waterfalls and foaming cataracts.

One must-visit offshore attraction is the **Kornati archipelago**, an extraordinarily beautiful group of largely uninhabited islands whose sparse covering of shrubs and sage produces an unearthly palette of grey, green and purple shades. A major target for yachting folk, the Kornati can also be reached on day-excursions from the mainland.

Sweeping views of the coastal islands can be enjoyed from the desolate grey slopes of the Velebit mountains, where the **Paklenica National Park** offers everything from cliff-enclosed gorge trails to scenic ridge-top hikes.

Those who make it to the far east of the country will be rewarded with a glimpse of the mysterious sunken forests of **Kopački rit**, a renowned haven for wading birds.



repaired, and tourists have been quick to return. Just offshore lie the sparsely populated islands of **Koločep**, **Lopud** and **Šipan** – oases of rural calm only a short ferry ride away from Dubrovnik's tourist bustle. Also reachable from Dubrovnik is one of the Adriatic's most beautiful islands, the densely forested and relaxingly serene **Mljet**.

Most Adriatic **beaches** are pebbly or rocky affairs, and on some parts of the coast man-made concrete bathing platforms make up for the lack of a proper strand. The most attractive sweeps of pebble beach are at **Bol**, on the island of Brač, and at the towns lining the **Makarska Riviera** south of Split. Sandy beaches are rare, though glorious examples can be found at **Baška** on the island of Krk, the **Lopar peninsula** on Rab, or **Lumbarda** on Korčula.

When to go

Croatia's climate follows two patterns: **Mediterranean** on the coast, with warm summers and mild winters, and **continental** inland – slightly hotter during the summer, and extremely cold in winter, with average daily temperatures barely scraping freezing from December to February. **July and August** constitute the peak season on the Adriatic, and this is definitely the time to visit if busy beaches and lively café society are what you're looking for. Many Croats make their way to the coast at this time, and social and cultural activity in the inland cities tends to dry up as a result. Peak-season daytime temperatures can be roasting, both on the coast and inland, and dawn-to-dusk sightseeing can be a gruelling experience at the height of summer. Hotel accommodation soon fills up in the peak season, and it may be more relaxing to travel in **June and September**, when there is significantly less pressure on facilities. From October to May the coast can be very quiet indeed, and many hotels and tourist attractions may well shut up shop for the winter. **Autumn** is a good time to enjoy inland Istria and national park areas like the Plitvice Lakes and the River Krka, when the woodland colours produced by the mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees are at their best. Given the innocuous winters on the Adriatic coast, urban sightseeing in historic centres such as Zadar, Split and Dubrovnik can be enjoyable at any time of year. It's also worth bearing in mind that hotel prices on the Adriatic may be up

▶ Rovinj





to fifty percent cheaper in winter than they are in peak season. Winters in inland Croatia are a different kettle of fish entirely: snow is common here over this period, and can be a picturesque backdrop to sightseeing, although transport in highland areas is frequently disrupted as a result. **Spring** is well into its stride by mid-March, and in southern Dalmatia the sea might be warm enough to swim in by mid- to late May.

Average temperatures (°C)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dubrovnik	8.3	9.1	11.2	13.9	17.8	22.2	25.6	25.0	22.3	17.8	12.9	10.2
Split	7.5	8.5	11.5	12.8	18.9	23.9	26.7	26.1	22.8	16.7	12.5	9.5
Zagreb	0	1.2	5.5	11	16	18.7	22.3	21.8	15.6	12.3	5.4	2.3

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things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything Croatia has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective and subjective taste of the country's highlights, from Baroque palaces to perfectly grilled fresh seafood. They're arranged in five colour-coded categories to help you find the very best things to see, do and experience. All entries have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.



01 **Skradinski buk** Page 298 • Head for Krka National Park to admire this stunning series of waterfalls.



02 Truffle Days, Istria Page 195 • The start of the truffle-hunting season is marked by festivities throughout Istria in September – especially in Buzet, where the world’s largest truffle omelette is eagerly scooped by an army of celebrants.



03 Diocletian’s Palace, Split Page 315 • Taken over by the townsfolk centuries ago, the Roman emperor’s pied-à-terre now forms the chaotic heart of the modern city.

04 Fresh seafood Page 45 • The rich waters of the Adriatic produce enough varieties of fish to fill an aquatic encyclopedia; expertly grilled, they’re the perfect centerpiece to any meal.



05 Hvar Page 352

• The swankiest resort on the Adriatic is also one of the most evocative, offering a welter of Renaissance palaces and churches.



06 Trogir cathedral Page 302

• This venerable monument to medieval Christianity bears the most spectacular stone carvings in the country.



07 Zadar Page 268

• Vibrant peninsula town packed with Roman ruins, Romanesque churches and café-crowded alleyways.



08 **The coastal ferry** Page 37 • Wending its way from Rijeka in the north to Dubrovnik in the south, and passing some spectacular maritime scenery on the way, this is Croatia's one must-do journey.



09 **Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb** Page 91 • Always a hot-bed of cutting-edge culture, Croatia bursts confidently onto the European arts map with this exciting new building.

10 Čigoč Page 141 • This bucolic timber-built village in the Lonjsko polje wetlands is the famed nesting-ground of white storks.



11 Tvrđalj Page 359 • Tucked away in the alleyways of Stari Grad, this Renaissance nobleman's house is as restful a spot as you will find on the Dalmatian coast.



12 Peljesac peninsula Page 383 • Explore rugged mountain scenery, quiet coves and unspoilt seaside villages in a region renowned for its robust red wines and fantastic seafood.



13 Lošinj island Page 220 • Unhurried atmosphere, unspoilt fishing ports and lush Mediterranean vegetation make this one of the most charming spots in the northern Adriatic.



14 Scuba diving Page 55 • Fast becoming the number-one activity on the coast, offering the perfect opportunity to get up close to Croatia's colourful undersea world.

15 Istrian hill towns Page 191 • The weatherbeaten, brown-stone settlements of Motovun, Oprtalj and Grožnjan provide the perfect vantage points from which to survey the lush landscape of central Istria.





16 Café society Page 46 • Pavement cafés play a key social role in this nation of gregarious coffee-gluttons.



17 Paklenica National Park Page 244 • A hiker's paradise, combining craggy limestone gorges, dense pine forests and meadow-carpeted alpine uplands.



18 Varaždin Page 119 • A postcard-perfect Baroque town, complete with crumbling palaces, ornate churches and a unique garden cemetery.



19 Plitvice Lakes Page 136 • A bewitching sequence of foaming waterfalls and turquoise lakes, hemmed in by forest-clad hills.



20 The Zagorje Page 109 • In Zagreb's rural hinterland, hilltop castles such as Veliki Tabor and Trakošćan perch decoratively above vineyards, cornfields and turkey-filled farmyards.



21 Trsteno Page 416 • Relax in Renaissance gardens, in a beautiful coastal village just north of Dubrovnik.

22 Walking Dubrovnik's walls Page 400 • The briefest of trots round the battlements will serve as a breathtaking introduction to this ancient city.





23 Amphitheatre, Pula Page 167 • Imperial Rome's greatest gift to the eastern Adriatic, this awesome arena still serves as the venue for pack-'em-in summertime concerts.



24 Sea kayaking Page 55 • The Dalmatian coast is often best enjoyed from the water, and what better way to see it than by taking a leisurely paddle.



25 The Elaphite islands Page 422 • These easy-to-explore, largely car-free islands offer great hiking and sandy beaches.



26 The Dominican monastery, Dubrovnik
Page 407 • The quiet cloister provides a perfect home for a small but superb collection of Renaissance paintings.

27 Rovinj Page 176 • Riviera-town chic collides with fishing-port charm in the most Italianate of Istria's coastal resorts.

