

# Croatia and the Dalmatian Coast

Croatia faces Italy on the Adriatic Sea and offers its own unique beauty with a lot of Italian influences. Although not as familiar to Americans, this has long been a favorite vacation spot for Europeans. Delightfully diverse, Croatia is blessed with a mild Mediterranean climate, pebbled beaches and ancient ruins. Islands dot the coastline and many small towns sprinkle the hillsides with cliffs, turquoise blue water and views in all directions. We started our journey on the Istrian Peninsula



visiting just two of the harbor towns along the way. PULA has some excellent ruins including a fully intact coliseum! It was a fun surprise to find gladiators in full costume too. Great photo opportunities! We then went on to the small town of ROVINJ which rises dramatically above the sea and is better known as Eastern Europe's Riviera. Lovely indeed, the city is full of charm with tiny streets, locally made products, street cafes and a boat bobbing harbor. People there seem relaxed as they go about the same business of a thousand years past. We should have stayed there longer.

Traveling down the Dalmatian Coast, we came to the fast paced, big city of SPLIT. Located right on the edge of a busy sea port, one "strolls the Riva" that is lined with café's and large King Palms. The Diocletian Palace is in the center of Old Town and here many locals have made themselves home in the rubble of the crumbling walls. It's most interesting to see shops and living quarters inside every usable space possible. Cushions make ally steps a place to eat. Tunneled archways are used for artists or museums. Tiny enclosures are used as restaurants or shops. The peristyle center square was designed to impress and still does with its large granite columns joined together by linked arches. But to me the vestibule that connects the main square and the Imperial apartments was the most interesting. It's a small circular entry with a half-intact domed ceiling that just happens to be a place for great acoustics. Here we found a cappella singers performing traditional harmonies....nice classical touch. There is just so much to see and do. We mostly stayed in the Old Town section but Split is definitely a place you could spend a lifetime. It is steeped in history and has a fascinating mix of the old world with the new conveniences.

Traveling down the coast we entered DUBRONIK, the "Pearl of the Adriatic". Dubrovnik has been independent from Yugoslavia only since the war of 1991. The untouched fairy tale city was brutally attacked and is doing construction in hopes to return it to its original glory. Steps, steps, steps and more steps is how you get around this city. Our hotel room was 87 steps down to the main square.....better known as the Stradum. Steps up lead to this ancient stone wall that has been in existence since the sixth century. The wall itself is about six to ten feet wide and is about a mile to walk. Canon coves, forts and gates with drawbridges circle the life of many locals who live and work here. There is a lot of Roman influence in its architecture and it too has an epic history to share. Today the locals have a no nonsense attitude and go about their daily work with noticeable pride. Displayed all over town is the word Libertas which is the city's motto and means "freedom". I loved being in the center of this tiny

world but I think my legs had reached their limit by the time I finished trying to see all the wonders it had to offer. Their main industry now is tourism. Thousands of people visit here every year. But no matter how crowded or difficult to get around, this is a unique and wonderful place to see. That sums it up. Dubrovnik is delightful. A must see pearl placed within a protected shell.

