

DALMATIA



CENTRAL

The Heart of Adriatic

CROATIA





Central Dalmatia - The Heart of the Adriatic

Whether you want to discover Dalmatia through the distinctive natural beauty of its coastline, islands and interior, or through its cultural attractions and the layers of history that are written in the stones of its streets and squares - each of these paths will lead you to central Dalmatia - the heart of the Adriatic and the heart of the coastline, an area where you will encounter Croatian history, heritage and culture that can be "read" better than any book.

From prehistoric times and antiquity, when the first colonies on the islands and coast appeared, and the first Croatian kings were crowned, where wars were fought over this small piece of coast that was conquered and re-conquered by those to whom it belonged, the conflicts and the victims have created legends and heroes, protectors and saints. And that is why its inhabitants have loved it, protected it, defended it, and died for it. This was no accident; the heart has always written the history of this region.

That is the way it was when, on the 1 May 305 A.D., the Roman Emperor Gaius Valerius Diocletianus departed from Rome towards his new home, a luxurious imperial palace on the site of present day Split because he wanted to spend the days of his imperial retirement on the gentle bay overgrown with Spanish broom where he had spent his youth. The entire world was at his feet, he could have gone anywhere, but he was ruled by - his heart. In later centuries, and for 1,700 years, the heart also created from the imperial palace the core of the largest urban centre on the Adriatic. In much the same way, various rulers, nobles and other distinguished persons of their time have written the history of the islands of Vis, Hvar and Brač, and the cities of Trogir, Omiš, Makarska, Solin, Sinj and Kaštel.





That is why in central Dalmatia, barely 30 kilometres away from each other, there are two monuments under the protection of UNESCO and included in the World Heritage List: Diocletian's Palace in Split and the historic centre of the town of Trogir. Between them lies Salona, today the largest archaeological site on the Croatian Adriatic, and once the capital city of the Roman province of Dalmatia. The present town of Solin, situated on the ruins of Salona, also played an important role in Croatian history as the coronation city of the Croatian rulers.

The sunniest island, Hvar, is home to the most preserved example of ancient subdivision of land - the Starigradsko polje (field) - which is also under UNESCO protection. The city of Hvar also boasts one of the oldest European theatres, built in the historic centre of the town in 1612. It is the third oldest theatre in Europe and has been the centre of the cultural and social life of the town for nearly 400 years.

The cultural heritage of central Dalmatia was created by inspired artists who etched their art in the stone, marble and wood of the palaces of its cities. And they not only left unsurpassed masterpieces of their skilled hands but also a part of their heart which they put into the beauty of the houses and their facades, churches and museums, constructed carefully and with great love. Just how much the artists, who lived and worked here, loved the area in which they created is most evident in the Portal of the Trogir Cathedral, created by Master Radovan in 1240, as well as the stone scrollwork and sculptures of masters such as Bonin da Milana, Juraj Dalmatinac, Andrija Alešije, Nikola Firentinac and many others who left the works of their own hands as an anthology of art. The walnut doorframes of the Split Cathedral, produced by the master Andrija Buvin in 1214, are recorded in the history of European Romanesque wood sculpture.

Along with the rich artistic achievements that central Dalmatia has inspired in the past, the region has subsequently produced several great artistic names, including Emanuel Vidović, the most famous Croatian painter of the beginning of

the 20th century. Most of his works are landscapes of his region, suffused with his watercolours and oils with all of his love of the sea, sky, clouds, sunsets, and the coastline of his Dalmatia. The greatest achievements in sculpture were by Ivan Meštrović, a world-renowned contemporary artist whose works in stone, wood and bronze can be found in the Meštrović Gallery in Split but also in the recognisable famous monuments like that of Gregory of Nin at the north entrance of Diocletian's Palace.

The beginnings of Croatian statehood are in central Dalmatia, as are the beginnings of the Christianity of the Croatian people, who in the 7th century gave their hearts to the Virgin Mary. There are many churches, chapels and shrines devoted to this most loyal protectress of Croatia, including Our Lady of the Island in Solin, which according to legend protected its people against the might of the Turks in 1715. The grateful defenders adorned her picture with a golden crown beneath which was written, "Forever crowned in celebration of victory. In the year 1715." Since that time, the Virgin Mary has been called the Miraculous, and in memory of the victory over the Turks, the chivalric games known as the Sinjska Alka have been held. It might be said that the Split Cathedral of Saint Doimus, the former mausoleum of the Emperor Diocletian, is the oldest cathedral in the world because it has served for so long as a place of public worship. Next to the cathedral, which is also the resting place of the bones of Saint Doimus, the city's patron saint, the residents of Split have raised a magnificent bell tower, which today has become the symbol of the city. What is also special about central Dalmatia is its tradition of preserving popular and religious customs in processions, vigils, walks and votives, most frequently linked to Catholic holidays and patron saints. The public procession of the Stations of the Cross that has been held on the island of Hvar for centuries on the evening between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, and which passes through various chapels and small churches, is an unforgettable experience of an authentic religious tradition. There are almost no urban centres

on the coast, the islands, or in Zagora that doesn't keep some special piece of history and culture of that area, an item of interest that shows the importance of the area in the course of history tucked away in an old trunk. Thus, in the Franciscan monastery in Zaostrog near Makarska you will find a painting by an unknown 18th century artist called "The Last Supper" which along with Jesus and his apostles shows a dog, a Dalmatian, which derives its name from this region and the Illyrian tribe known as the Dalmata. No less interesting is the "House of the Happy Man" in the church of the town of Omiš, which received its name from the owner, who in the 15th century and with a heart full of happiness, wrote the following inscription on the door: "Lord, I thank you that I have lived in this world."

It's enough to encounter just once the unique combination of the blueness of the coast and the greenery of the pine trees with the most beautiful stretches of sand and gravel beaches on the Adriatic, so that - your heart races. It is not only the coast that entices one to rest and enjoy in the many delights offered. There are also sights that feed the soul and fill the heart with bliss. Centuries-old pine trees overhang the beaches, bending toward the ground as if they themselves have decided to provide visitors with protection from the sun, the pleasure of being in the shade next to the sea on white pebbles with a breath of the refreshing maestral wind. A glance upward stops on the peaks of Biokovo, Kozjak and Mosor, or to Vidovo gora on Brač, the highest island summit in the Adriatic; and then the view extends to that string of sunny islands - Hvar, Šolta and Vis, which have preserved their little stone villages far from the noise and fast pace of everyday life. Here for a moment it seems like life stops but it is actually pulsating slowly to another rhythm, the rhythm of tiny stone streets, olive groves, vineyards, and fields of lavender.

But there where the sea ends, the magic of the heart of the Adriatic does not stop. It beats more strongly when behind the coastal mountains, only about 20 kilometres from the sea, a magical world in the embrace of mountains and rivers opens up in

front of the chance traveller. This is the green heart of Zagora, full of enchanting beauty, legends, authentic stories, centuries-old fortresses and resplendent nature. If someone describes Dalmatia only as an area of history, culture and beautiful beaches, don't believe them because in the green heart of Zagora there are unforgettable places for sports activities. The region is known for its horseback riding schools and its rural tourism. Well-maintained cycling paths in the interior, along the coast and on the central Dalmatian islands wind through a gentle landscape, while on the rapids of the Cetina River and in its gorges, canyoning and canoe safaris, rafting and free climbing enthusiasts gather. There are places on the Makarska Riviera that are ideal for a family vacation, but also an active one in the nearby Nature Park Biokovo.

When your heart has had its fill of the day's pleasures, your hosts will invite you to the table, the best place for a hearty welcome. They will offer you not only fish and shellfish, or lamb with a unique taste, but also specialties like Brač vitalac and sheep cheese in oil. The Cetina region is known for arambaši, river crabs and frog specialties. On the coast and the islands, do not forget to treat your taste buds to soparnik; Dalmatian fish stew, all kinds of fresh fish, shellfish and vegetables; desserts like rafiola, Kaštelan cake and Makarana cake; Vis hib, kroštule, fritters or paprenjake from Hvar. You can also try the famous local wines - plavac, vugava and others - made by the hard working winemakers with grapes from the steep hills nearby.

If you get tired of all of these tastes and aromas, when you have fulfilled your soul and body, share a rare privilege today with your hosts - a visit to the region where the water in the rivers and creeks is drinkable, clean and safe, and the water in the houses also has a pleasant taste and genuine freshness. This is proof of the fact that here man has not played with God-given nature; instead throughout its two thousand years of history he has also protected it for future generations, those who will enjoy central Dalmatia as the heart of the Adriatic tomorrow.





Split

It is hard to say what will leave a stronger impression on today's visitor to the city: the historic town centre or the way of life of its residents. As, life satisfaction with an open style is how Split inhabitants live, drinking coffee on the Riva, with their friends, or within Diocletian's Palace, whose stone walls give a refreshing coolness on humid days. Split takes great satisfaction in placing all of its beauty at the disposal of its visitors. They can walk its streets and pass through centuries of history and art; take a peek at the riches of its museums, galleries and churches in order to understand some small part of its complex history; or enjoy the shade of the pine trees on Marjan Hill and swimming on its beaches. Whatever choice the visitor makes will not be the wrong one because on the streets of this city, whose central area with Diocletian's Palace has been registered on the World Heritage List, they will be greeted by the boisterous, happy residents, while in the quiet exhibition halls filled with the history of this eternally young city.

The area surrounding Split

The attractive coastline and the rich hinterland are an inseparable part of the city of Split. The six kilometres of gravel beach at Podstrana at the southern entrance to the city are a rarely encountered urban area. The beach extends right up to homes,

apartments, small family hotels, and also five-star hotels. The famous Vranjač Cave is located in the northern approach to Split, while the medieval Klis Fortress, situated on the sheer cliffs of an inaccessible gorge between the mountains of

Mosor and Kozjak, dominates the landscape. The fortress provides a view of Solin, ancient Salona, and of the Jadro River, which has provided drinking water to the city and the rest of the region for 17 centuries.





Trogir

15

The historic centre of this harmonious city, also registered on the World Heritage List, is one of the most beautiful towns on the Adriatic. A tour of Trogir, which has existed on this site since the third century A.D., is a special experience, although its central area is a barely 750 paces big, as measured by the poet Pavao Andreis a long time ago. The Convent of St. Nicholas even today preserves a relief of the Greek god Kairos, who was known as the "god of the fortunate moment," and who appears once in a lifetime, giving man the chance to "grab the golden ring".

On the narrow stone streets of the city, which is also known as the museum city, are the palaces of noble families, while in its churches and on its squares are presented anew that luxury of talent by which artists have brought delight for centuries to historians and visitors, and pride to its residents. Trogir today lives by the rhythm of a modern tourist town and it is a favourite destination of travellers and sailing enthusiasts, who are inspired by its ancient old stone beauty in the heart of the Adriatic.



The area surrounding Trogir

Small forested gravel coves on one of the most exuberant coastal landscapes; a riviera on which luxurious villas have been situated next to the sea since antiquity; stone and gravel beaches and an immaculately clean sea are the main attractions of this tourist area. You should also see the 16th century mill on Pantana and the 15th century tower in Marina. The nearby island of Čiovo is linked by bridge with Trogir, and a short walk from its villages will lead you to hidden beaches with dense pine forests.





Kaštela

19

A deep and well-protected bay between Split and Trogir acts like a natural refuge and safe haven and even in ancient times Kaštela had become a place where the wealthy from nearby larger cities built their summer residences. Out of fear of the invading Turks, fortifications were erected right on the coastline - 15 of them by the end of the 15th century - all in a Renaissance architectural style with rich interiors. About seven of these fortifications became settlements that eventually merged to create the present town of Kaštela.



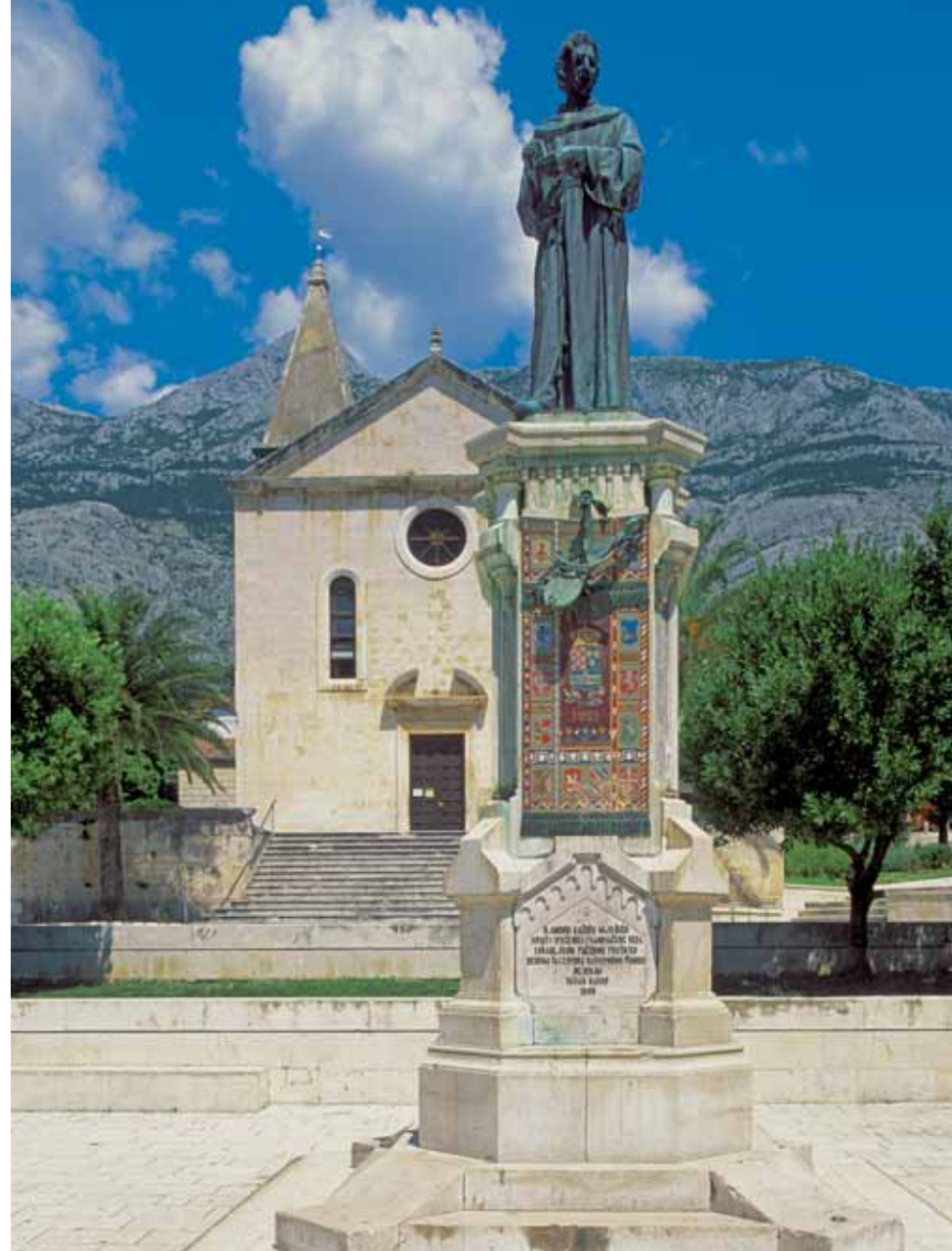
The area surrounding Omiš

The fortresses of Mirabela and Starigrad, and the Cetina River which flows into the sea here after a hundred kilometre journey through sheer cliffs, give the town of Omiš its special picturesqueness. In medieval times Omiš pirates attacked ships on the Adriatic from the canyon of the Cetina. This section of the coastline is also known for its exceptional sandy beaches, including the municipal beach in Omiš - more than a kilometre long and with 700 metres of shallows. The entire area of the Omiš Riviera is also known for its freshwater springs, one of the largest of which is at Vrulje which can be seen on the surface of the sea.



Makarska

Makarska is the central city of the tourist riviera that carries the same name. It is an attractive summer vacation area with a variety of attractions that offer everyone the vacation of their dreams. Rising above Makarska is the mountain of Biokovo, in whose deep crags water freezes even in the middle of the summer. The town is situated at the base of the mountain in a natural harbour formed by two peninsulas with forested gravel beaches squeezed in a kilometre wide area that separates the blueness of the sea from the mountain heights. The easiest place to learn the history of the town is at the 500-year old Franciscan monastery, which contains a picture gallery, a library and the unique Malakološki Museum.



Makarska Riviera

Sixty kilometres of gravel beaches of the whitest stones and a string of tourist areas stretching out like pearls at the base of the mountain of Biokovo, with "its head in the lightning and its feet in the sea," make up the Makarska Riviera, which has a long and rich tradition of receiving guests, of active vacations, select gastronomic offerings and summer evenings filled with fun and song.

Quite simply, this area has the most beautiful beaches on the Adriatic, drawn into the lap of the stones and pine trees, where tourism is a part of everyday life and tradition and of a desire to always be better, different, and more beautiful.



The Island of Brač

Brač is most famous for the quarrying of the white stone that was used to build the White House in Washington D.C., the parliament buildings in Vienna and Budapest, Diocletian's Palace in Split and the cathedrals in Trogir and Šibenik. The monastery of Pustinja Blaca, dating from 1550, even today provides an insight into medieval life on the island, as do the isolated small churches of the island's interior. Bol with its beach known as the Zlatni Rat, whose appearance changes depending on the direction of the wind and waves; Vidova gora (Vid's Mountain); the town of Supetar, and the County Museum in Škrip are just some of the fascinations of this largest of the central Dalmatian islands.







The Island of Hvar

31

The island of sunshine and lavender, of ancient stone walls and shepherds' cottages, is one of those places that fill the soul with beauty. It is not known if greater attention is drawn to the harmony of history and art or the beauty of nature. A walk in the town of Hvar along its stone streets polished by the centuries or through the largest island marketplace on both sides of the Adriatic, as well as a walk in a field registered in the World Heritage List - the Old Town is a unique experience that opens the book of history.

In the alluring fragrance and the purple glow of lavender fields, in vineyards drenched in the rays of the sun that flow into the best wine, Hvar remains the symbol of organised tourism.



The Island of Šolta

Regardless of what you first see on this small island at the entrance to Split, a small field cottage or the luxurious villa of the Marchi family dating from 1706, Šolta will capture your heart. Very few places like this have deep and secure coves providing peace, rest and a complete change from any other kind of tourism. The island of honey, carob, olives and olive oil, aromatic herbs, with its beauty and harmony has inspired artists and writers who have created some of their most beautiful works here.



The Island of Vis

On the open sea it is the most famous Hellenic settlement in Croatia - the remains of the Greek colony of Issa. Issa's artefacts have been deposited in the Archaeological Museum of Vis. The most famous example is the bronze head of the Greek goddess Artemis who is the symbol of Vis. The island is dotted with old churches and picturesque stone houses, while the modern panorama of its sheltered coves is filled with yachts and small boats, sailing enthusiasts and divers. The authenticity of its towns and villages has been preserved, especially in Komiža, where above the city the view extends to the open sea and to the distant Adriatic islands of Biševo, Sveti Andrija and Palagruža.



Zagora

There are very few places where the blue of the sea comes so close to the continental air like in Zagora, through whose green slopes gently flowing rivers wander, separated from the sea by the mountains of Kozjak, Mosor and Biokovo.

Drinking this water, which in one moment is gently babbling and in the next moment is threatening to roar and foam, one drinks in the power of the unbreakable highland soul of its people. A visit to the clear green rivers, the cave of Vranjača with a petrified waterfall and underground caverns; to the unique Karst phenomena of the Blue and Red Lakes, to the fields of Sinj and Vrgorački whose abundant produce feeds the entire region, is an unrepeatable feeling of the touch of authentic nature.

Time, people and the legends in this area, in which the verbal story telling still lives today, have created a unique oasis of interwoven history that is wrought in the stone houses and centuries old fortresses.

After such outdoor activities, the tradition of gathering around the table with homemade food, produced in the sharp mountain air and the richly irrigated valleys will give you some new tastes and restore your lost energy.





Gastronomic pleasures

The food offered on the tables of Dalmatia, as it has been for centuries before us, follows modern nutritional standards: lightly cooked and easily digested food, featuring large quantities of fish, olive oil, vegetables and spices at every meal. However, in the Dalmatian gastronomic repertoire the main ingredient and the method in which it is prepared, are equally important, as are each of the special herbs that, along with parsley and garlic, create a small culinary secret with the aroma of laurel, rosemary or basil, with olives and capers always on the table.

When talking about meat specialties that the locals are particularly proud of, Dalmatian pršut (smoked ham), smoked and dried in a barrel, has no equal. It is most often served with sheep cheese and lamb.





A vacation for the body and soul

A visit to central Dalmatia can be much more than a quiet vacation in the sun and the cleanest waters of the Mediterranean, regardless of whether you are in a hotel, a private apartment, a camp, or on a boat or yacht. The excitement offered by sports activities adapted to the average bodily fitness and for those who like to test the limits of endurance and adventure will leave you with an experience of freedom and wonderful memories. Go diving in the blue sea, walk on well-maintained paths along the coast and islands, help the locals harvest grapes and lavender, find out what is so intoxicating in the fragrances of the medicinal herbs of Dalmatia's Karst rocks, discover the challenges of mountain tracks and climbing and descending the rapids of swift-flowing rivers, catch the wind in your sails, and enjoy in every possible way the historical richness, the cultural heritage and everything else offered by the blue sea and central Dalmatia - the heart of the Adriatic.





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