

CROATIA & MONTENEGRO**Day Hiking in Adriatica****14 days**

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Day 1 *Arrival in Kotor*

Today we arrive in Kotor, Montenegro [the closest airport is Tivat (TIV)].*

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kotor was inhabited even at the times of Illyrians and Romans. Its history is also entwined with that of the Venetian Empire. Within its walls, the city of Kotor has retained a mediaeval feel. A map of the old city shows hardly a single right angle; the town consists of a maze of tiny alleys that meet unexpectedly to form "squares" that are anything but square. Overshadowed by both towering cliffs and the high walls of four-storey stone houses, some of these narrow lanes must never see sunshine. One of the great pleasures of Kotor is wandering at random through this little labyrinth.

PLEASE NOTE: We rate this tour as "moderate" in terms of its physicality. Though all of our hikes are "day walks" and therefore optional, in order to fully enjoy the areas visited, you should be adequately fit in order to safely and comfortably participate in each day's activities. If you think that this trip might be too strenuous for you, we recommend our non-hiking Adriatic trips.

* If you are having difficulty finding satisfactory air connections from your home airport, some passengers have had success flying into Dubrovnik instead and making their own way to Kotor.

Overnight in Kotor.

Meal Plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Kotor: Fortress of St Ivan*

This morning we enjoy a walking tour* to see a number of the city's fortifications and monuments dating from the time of Venetian rule, including the Cathedral of St Tryphon, which contains a rich collection of artifacts. Older than many famous churches and cathedrals in Europe, the Cathedral of St. Tryphon has a treasury of immense value. In its interior there are frescos from the 14th century, a stone ornament above the main altar in which the life of St. Tryphon is depicted, as well as a relief of saints in gold and silver. The most representative works of Kotor's masters and craftsmen are kept in this Cathedral, making its collection quite unique.

Later we'll climb the city walls to the Fortress of St Ivan, passing the Chapel of Our Lady of Salvation along the way. The steps begin at the northwest corner of the city. It's a stiff climb so don't set off without something to drink: there are 1,350-1,500 steps according to various guidebooks. From the highest point the ground drops away sharply on three sides with the rooftops of Kotor immediately below. To the north you can see the whole inner part of the bay. Look out for a dome near the shore to the west -- it belongs to the implausibly large church in the village of Prcanj.

When we have finished admiring the view we can scramble around the crumbling ruins with a freedom rarely found in more litigious countries -- the only ones likely to challenge you are the goats. After our hike, you'll have some free time to enjoy Kotor. Browse the town at your leisure and discover souvenir, antique and craft shops, boutiques and market stalls.

* Depending on season and concerns about weather, your Tour Leader may elect to hike first thing and then tour Kotor in the afternoon.

TOTAL WALKING TIME +/- 3 HOURS. Elevation gain/loss 530m/1,738 ft (this is likely the most strenuous hike of our trip, given it's steepness and amount of vertical rise).

Our hikes: Because some hikes can/may be adjusted at the discretion of your Tour Leader depending on things like weather and group interest, the final distances/durations of our hikes as indicated in our itinerary should be taken as guidance only. In the meantime, however, we can advise that, generally-speaking, our walks are leisurely on well-trodden pathways over undulating terrain (some walks are downhill), 2-5 hours in overall duration with plenty of breaks for refreshment, photos, and taking it all in.

Overnight in Kotor.

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Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 *Kotor - Perast, Montenegro - Dubrovnik, Croatia*

Our journey to Croatia travels via Boka Kotorska, the only fjord in the Mediterranean, a bay of 32 km / 20 miles cut deep into the stone of the Orjen and Lovcen mountains. We will drive along the coast to the town of Perast where we take a small boat to Perast's most famous site, Gospa od Skrpjela (Our Lady of the Rock), a picturesque chapel built on the only artificially built island in the Adriatic. The island was built upon a rock after two Venetian sailors from Perast miraculously found a picture of the Virgin Mary on it in 1452.

We continue to Dubrovnik, or ancient Ragusa, whose story begins in the 7th century when it was under the protection of the Byzantine Empire. In the 12th century, Ragusa, formerly an island, merged with mainland settlements and the channel between was filled in with carted-in material. Today this area is the main street of the old city named the Placa or Stradun. After shaking off the yoke of Venice in 1385, Ragusa became an independent republic. It remained one of the most powerful maritime powers in the Mediterranean for over four centuries (until 1808). Ragusa was the link between the Mediterranean and the Balkans and hence developed into an important centre of trade and shipping. Dairy products, wax, honey, timber, coals, salt, silver, lead, copper, wine, oil, fish and slaves were all traded. During the "Golden Age" of Ragusa in the 16th century, she had the 3rd largest merchant fleet in the world and consulates in over 50 countries. After changing hands a number of times, the city was finally ceded to Croatia (former Yugoslavia) and in 1918 the Slavic name of Dubrovnik was officially adopted.

On arrival we'll walk the walls of Dubrovnik, considered by many to be a highlight of our visit. The total circuit is nearly 2km / 1.25 mi, and from the bastions you will have magnificent views of the city's monuments, including the Minceta Tower, Revelin Tower, and the mighty fortress of St. Lawrence, with walls 12m / 40 feet thick!

Overnight in Dubrovnik.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 *Dubrovnik: City Tour*

This morning features a walking tour of Dubrovnik's historic center. Dubrovnik has been called "Croatian Athens" and the "Pearl of the Mediterranean" for its astounding beauty, sophisticated history and culture, and prosperity.

Over the course of its tumultuous history, the city had to be extensively reconstructed; the earthquake of 1667 destroyed much of the city; and in recent memory, the town was bombarded by over 2,000 shells in 1991-92. After great international efforts, the city has been restored to its former glory, with its towering fortifications, magnificent medieval architecture, red tiled roofs, winding paved streets and picturesque harbours.

The afternoon is yours for independent exploration.

Overnight in Dubrovnik.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 5 *Dubrovnik - Ston - Korcula*

Today we travel by bus and ferry to the breathtaking island of Korcula. En route we stop at the Peljesac Peninsula where we can walk the city walls of the town of Ston and pause for lunch (the area is known for its wines and oysters!). Ston was a major fort of the Ragusan Republic whose defensive walls were regarded as a notable feat of medieval architecture. The town's inner wall measures 890 metres in length, while the Great Wall outside the town has a circumference of 5 km.

We continue to Korcula. Situated on a small peninsula, the cluster of brilliant red tiled roofs perch above the aquamarine harbour

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waters, clear to a depth of 21m! Korcula was settled by the Greeks who called the island "Korkyra Melaina", or "Black Corfu" because of the dark appearance of its densely wooded forests. Today the island is covered with olive groves and vineyards; cereals, carob, citrus and vegetables are all grown on this island, as well as an array of wild herbs. The island is also proud of its heritage: it is the home of traditional shipbuilding and stone masonry, and also the center of Croatian folk traditions of costume and dance.

Later this afternoon we will have a walking tour of the old town. The street plan of the town is unique and often compared to a fishbone pattern: the north-south streets allowed the defenders of the town to reach the walls and towers, and the east-west lanes were designed to capture the pleasant maestral winds and minimize the force of the cold "bora." The Venetian Cathedral of St. Mark is an architectural delight, squeezed into a small square. Tucked into a narrow lane nearby is the small house where it is believed Marco Polo was born. We will also visit the Treasury and Town Museum with fascinating exhibitions of Korcula's history and traditions, from prehistoric times to the present.

Overnight in Korcula.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 ***Korcula: 'Napoleon's Road'***

Today we begin our walk along via 'Napoleon's Road' to Pupnat, stopping for a traditional Dalmatian lunch at a small local restaurant en route.

Pupnat is a village in the interior eastern part of the island of Korcula, located on the regional road running along the island. The population of Pupnat is about 500 making this the smallest village on the island. The name Pupnat, according to some interpreters, derives from "pampinata," which means vine leaves. The Illyrian lived around Pupnat, in the area of Mocila, where remains of Illyrian graves were found. The location of the village was chosen by its settlers, in the hilly part of the island so as to be invisible from the sea and passing pirates.

Our route passes small farms and vineyards surrounded by countless miles of dry stone walls and dotted with kucice -- traditional dry stone huts used for housing livestock. The prehistoric life that existed in the area was found in Jakasove Spila (cave). Zrnovo has numerous small churches that one can see walking along the road.

We transfer by road back to Korcula. Balance of the day at leisure in Korcula.

TOTAL WALKING TIME +/- 4 hrs; elevation variation +/- 100m / 330 ft.

Overnight in Korcula.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 7 ***Korcula - Hvar: Walking Tour***

Today we travel by ferry to Hvar, "Queen of the Dalmatian Islands," considered one of the ten most beautiful islands in the world.

The island of Hvar receives 2,724 hours of sunshine per year, more than anywhere else in Croatia, and is thus called the "Island of the Sun". Greeks from Paros first settled on the island in the 4th century BC in Pharos, the modern town of Stari Grad. In the 13th century, the capital of the island was transferred to the town of Hvar (a mutation of Pharos in Slavic) and prospered during the 3.5 centuries of Venetian rule. This picturesque town and marina is alive with the constant hum of activity.

This morning we have a walking tour through narrow streets to the 15th century Franciscan Monastery where we visit the Renaissance cloister, the old rectory that today houses a collection of lace, manuscripts and books; and the church with its remarkable collection of paintings. We visit St Stephen's Cathedral, and see the Arsenal (closed for refurbishment), a thick walled fortress overlooking the harbour.

For those interested, there is an excellent walk up to the Venetian castle above town.

Overnight in Hvar.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 *Hvar & Sveta Nedelja Hike*

This morning we drive by jeep to the village of Sveta Nedelja where we begin our uphill hike.* We then walk to the highest part of the island; you will enjoy beautiful scenery, a cave with a monastery, views of beautiful beaches, and vineyards. Once we reach the top, we are met by jeeps and transferred back to Hvar with time at leisure to enjoy this charming town.

Hvar is a high east-west ridge of Mesozoic limestone and dolomite, which was part of the mainland until approximately 11,000 years ago. Around that time, sea levels rose, filling the valleys that are now the channels between the islands. Hvar has a typical karst landscape, which means limited or no surface water, despite adequate rainfall, which disappears quickly into crevices in the ground. Farming in such areas requires careful conservation of water, and protection of the soil against erosion. The water cisterns in the fields, and the dry-stone walls, especially terracing on the slopes are necessary for the continued success of agriculture on the island. The island has a typical Mediterranean vegetation, mostly bare with woody scrub at higher, steeper elevations, turning to pine forests on the lower slopes.

* We choose to walk uphill as past travellers and guides noted that we are less likely to slip on loose material.

TOTAL WALKING TIME +/- 3 HOURS, 6 km / 3.73 miles. Elevation gain 550 m / 1,804 ft.

Overnight in Hvar.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

Day 9 *Hvar - Brac Island & Hermitage of Blaca*

This morning we will take an early ferry to the town of Bol on nearby Brac Island, the highest and third largest island in the Adriatic. Today's excursion takes us on a relaxing and panoramic boat ride along the coast of Brac to a hiking trail that leads us up to the intriguing Hermitage of Blaca, now a museum. Departing from Bol, our boat will pass Croatia's most famous beach, the Golden Horn, before continuing past pine forests, olive groves and coastal vineyards to the trailhead in Blaca Bay.

The reward for our 45 minute uphill climb is a visit to the dramatically situated Hermitage of Blaca, whose stone structures cling to cliff overlooking a dry ravine. The hermitage was established in the 16th century by monks from the mainland town of Poljice who sought refuge from invading Turks. Originally situated in a cave, the hermitage was built up over the centuries to include a church, school, astronomical observatory and library. Today the museum houses a unique collection of ancient books, clocks, astronomical instruments and artifacts from the life of the last monk to inhabit Blaca, Niko Milicevic.

After a tour of the hermitage we return to our boat in travel back to Bol, where you have the remainder of the afternoon to explore the town of Bol or swim at the Gold Horn.

TOTAL WALKING TIME +/- 2 hrs; elevation variation +/- 250m / 820 ft

Overnight on Brac.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 *Brac: Island Tour - Split*

After breakfast we'll explore Brac with its stone landscapes, olive groves, and sheep dotting the hillsides. Our bus tour starts begins

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with a long but gradual climb to the ridge of the island, across Brac to the village of Pucisca, home to a famous marble quarry. Stone from Brac has been used in a number of famous buildings, including Diocletian's Palace, the parliament buildings of Vienna and Budapest and the Canadian WWI memorial at Vimy Ridge.

Our next stop will take us to Vidova Gora (778m / 2,567 ft), the highest point on the island offering spectacular views. We continue to Supetar, where we will stop for lunch before boarding a ferry for Split, located on the mainland.

This afternoon we tour Split (ancient Spalato), the second largest city of Croatia. The historic city center actually lies in the walls of the enormous retirement Palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, built between 295-305 AD. The palace served as a palace, military fortress, and later, a fortified town. The city is enclosed by huge walls, pierced by 4 main gates, one on each side of the rectangular plan.

Enjoy the rest of the day exploring the streets of the former imperial city.

Overnight in Split.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 *Split - Paklenica National Park - Plitvice*

Today we travel to Plitvice via Paklenica National Park where we enjoy a hike. The park is situated south of the Velebit range of mountains (the largest in Croatia) and covers an area of just under 100 square km, with a mixture of high peaks with stunning views, deep gorges and beech and pine forests. We take the track leading from Velika Paklenica Canyon to the Mountain Hut. The track has 10 educational boards providing information on the natural features of the park and cultural features of the area.

The first part of our hike is a steep incline for about 15 minutes; after that the grade is gradual uphill.

Our final destination is Plitvice, where 16 lakes, each at a different level, join each other in a series of cascading waterfalls.

TOTAL WALKING TIME +/- 4 HOURS. 10 km / 6.2 miles. Elevation gain 200 m / 656 ft.

Overnight at Plitvice.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 *Plitvice Lakes National Park - Zagreb*

Travertine terraces have been continuously reforming themselves over 10,000 years as calcium carbonate dissolves and settles, forming barriers and cascades. Imagine Niagara Falls diced and sprinkled over a heavily forested Grand Canyon. This lush valley of terraced lakes is laced together by waterfalls and miles of pleasant wooden-plank walks. Countless cascades and strangely clear and colourful water make the Plitvice Lakes National Park a misty natural wonderland. The ever-changing fluid landscape -- created by water, gravity, limestone and time -- is mesmerizing.

Look for wildlife as you hike. The park is home to deer, wolves, wildcats, wild boar, and more than 160 species of birds (from eagles to herons to owls). The lakes (and local menus) are full of trout. The entire area is protected as one of UNESCO's Natural World Heritage Sites. We will follow wooden paths on our walk around the Lower and Upper Lakes, ending with a short boat ride across the largest lake.

In the late afternoon we will drive to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.

TOTAL WALKING TIME +/- 4 hours (leisurely, easy)

Overnight in Zagreb.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Zagreb: City Tour

Today's city tour features Governor Jelacic Square, undoubtedly the very heart of the capital. Located in Zagreb's center, the square is dominated by the statue of Josip Jelacic who became the governor of the triple Kingdom of Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia on the 23rd of March, 1848. In the District of Gradec, we take a funicular from the Lower Town to the Upper, which has connected, for centuries, the old part of town with Ilica Street, the main shopping area. We will then stroll back down to Kaptol, St Catherine's Cathedral, Church of St Mark, St. Stephen's Church, and Lotrscak Tower.

After our tour you will have time at leisure to explore, shop, relax, visit museums etc. Your Tour Leader can help plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Zagreb.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure

Departure from Zagreb.

SRETAN PUT!

Meal Plan: Breakfast