

Split & Central Dalmatia



Central Dalmatia is the most action-packed, sight-rich and diverse part of Croatia, with dozens of castles, fascinating islands, spectacular beaches, dramatic mountains, quiet ports and an emerging culinary scene, not to mention Split's Diocletian Palace and medieval Trogir (both Unesco World Heritage sites). In short, this part of Croatia will grip even the most picky visitor.

The region stretches from Trogir in the northwest to Ploče in the southeast. Split is its largest city and a hub for bus and boat connections along the Adriatic coast. The rugged 1500m-high Dinaric Range provides the dramatic background to the region.

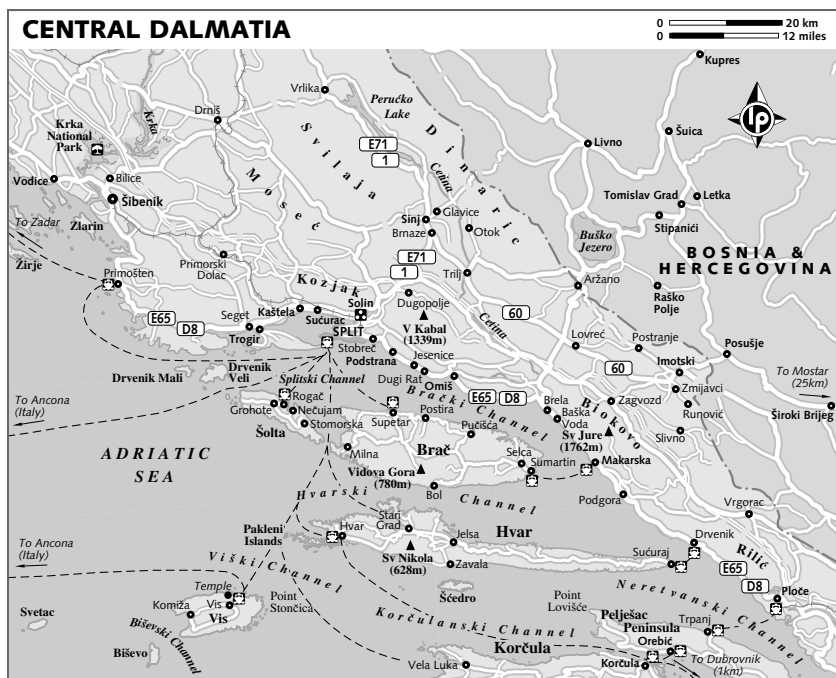
Diocletian's Palace is a sight like no other (a Roman ruin and the living soul of Split) and it would be a cardinal Dalmatian sin to miss out on the sights, bars, restaurants and general buzz inside it. The Roman ruins in Solin are altogether a more quiet, pensive affair, while Trogir is a tranquil city that's preserved its fantastic medieval sculpture and architecture. Then there is Hvar Town, the region's most popular destination, richly ornamented with Renaissance architecture, good food, a fun atmosphere and tourists – who are in turn ornamented with deep tans, big jewels and shiny yachts.

Let's not forget the coastline: you can choose from the slender and seductive Zlatni Rat on Brač, wonderful beaches in Brela on the Makarska Riviera, secluded coves on Brač, Šolta and Vis, or gorgeous (and nudie) beaches on the Pakleni Islands off Hvar. Best of all is that Dalmatia is always quite a bit warmer than Istria or the Gulf of Kvarner, and you can plunge into the crystalline Adriatic from the beginning of May right up until the end of September.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering the wonders and nightlife in Diocletian's Palace in **Split** (p220)
- Getting to know **Vis** (p240), Croatia's most remote island
- Stretching out on Croatia's sexiest beach, Zlatni Rat, in **Bol** (p247)
- Taking in the glamour in **Hvar Town** (p251) and getting into your birthday suit on the beaches of the **Pakleni Islands** (p254)
- Hiking up dramatic **Mount Biokovo** (p237) and getting views of Italy from the top





SPLIT

pop 173,700

The second-largest city in Croatia, Split (Spalato in Italian) is a great place to see Dalmatian life as it's really lived. Free of mass tourism and always buzzing, this is a city with just the right balance of tradition and modernity. Step inside Diocletian's Palace (a Unesco World Heritage site and one of the world's most impressive Roman monuments) and you'll see dozens of bars, restaurants and shops thriving amid the atmospheric old walls where Split life has been going on for thousands of years. Split's unique setting and exuberant nature make it one of the most delightful cities in Europe. The dramatic coastal mountains are the perfect backdrop to the turquoise waters of the Adriatic and you'll get a chance to appreciate the gorgeous Split cityscape when making a ferry journey to or from the city.

Split is often seen mainly as a transport hub to the hip nearby islands (which, indeed, it is), but the city has been sprucing itself up and attracting attention by renovating the old Riva

(seafront) and replacing the former cement strolling ground with a shiny, new marble look. Even though the modern transformation hasn't pleased all the locals, the new Riva is a beauty. The growing tourist demand also means that Split's city authorities are under pressure to expand the city's transport resources, and there's talk that in the near future the currently very handy bus station may be moved further out to make way for the harbour expansion (for big, shiny yachts and monstrous cruisers?) and luxury hotels.

HISTORY

Split achieved fame when the Roman emperor Diocletian (AD 245–313), noted for his persecution of early Christians, had his retirement palace built here from 295 to 305. After his death the great stone palace continued to be used as a retreat by Roman rulers. When the nearby colony of Salona (now Solin) was abandoned in the 7th century, many of the Romanised inhabitants fled to Split and barricaded themselves behind the high palace walls, where their descendants live to this day.