

croatian



- official language
- widely understood
- generally understood

For more details, see the **introduction**.

Croatian is the language of one of the world's newer countries. Like the country itself, Croatian has an intriguing, cosmopolitan, and at times fraught, history.

Croatian's linguistic ancestor was brought to the region in the sixth and seventh centuries AD by the South Slavs who may have crossed the Danube from the region now known as Poland. This ancestral language split off into two branches: East South Slavic, which later evolved into Bulgarian and Macedonian, and West South Slavic, of which Slovene, Serbian and Croatian are all descendants.

Croatia may be a peaceful country today but the Balkan region to which it belongs has a long history of invasion and conflict. These upheavals have enriched and politicised the language. The invasion by Charlemagne's armies and forced conversion to the Roman Church in AD 803 left its mark on Croatian in the form of words borrowed from Latin and the

adoption of the Latin alphabet rather than the Cyrillic alphabet (with which Serbian is written). Subsequent invasions by the Hapsburg, Ottoman and Venetian empires added vibrancy to the language through the influx of German, Turkish and Venetian dialect loan words. Many words from the standard Italian of Croatia's neighbour Italy have also added colour.

Linguists commonly refer to the languages spoken in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-

at a glance ...

language name:
Croatian

name in language:
hrvatski jezik
hr·vat·skee je·zeek

language family: Slavic

approximate number of speakers: 5 million

close relatives:
Bosnian, Macedonian,
Serbian and Slovenian

donations to English:
cravat, dalmatian

Hercegovina and Montenegro as members of the macro-language Serbo-Croatian while acknowledging differences between the individual languages. Croats, Serbs, Bosnians and Montenegrins themselves also generally maintain that they speak different languages. This polarisation of language identities reflects the desire to retain separate ethnic identities.

The good news is that, if you venture into Serbia or Montenegro, you'll be able to enrich your travel experience there by using this phrasebook – Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin are all mutually comprehensible. Croatian is also a handy *lingua franca* in the other states that made up the former Yugoslavia, as it's an official language in Bosnia-Herzegovina. People in Macedonia and Slovenia, who speak closely related languages, generally understand Croatian.

Croatian has plenty of appeal. As well as its rich vocabulary, it has a lovely repertoire of soft lipping sounds such as *sh*, *zh* and *ch* and a lilting musical rhythm due to its use of high and low pitches. It also has an intriguing grammar, quite different from English. It is, however, readily understandable.

Take this phrasebook with you to help make your trip hassle free. It's packed with all the practical language information you'll need and it will also open up a world of possibilities for social interaction and cultural exchange with the locals. Need more encouragement? Remember, the contact you make through using Croatian will make your travel experience unique. Local knowledge, new relationships and a sense of satisfaction are on the tip of your tongue, so don't just stand there – say something!

abbreviations used in this book

m	masculine	pol	polite
f	feminine	inf	informal
n	neuter	imp	imperfective
sg	singular	perf	perfective
pl	plural	lit	literally