



# Dubrovnik & Southern Dalmatia

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## Why Go?

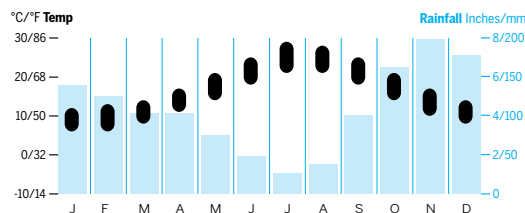
Dubrovnik is simply unique; its beauty is bewitching, its setting sublime. Not that it's a secret, quite the contrary: thousands of visitors walk along its marble streets every day of the year, gazing, gasping and happily snapping away.

The remarkable old town, ringed by mighty defensive walls, is a highlight of any trip to Croatia, capturing the very essence of a medieval Mediterranean fantasy. It's little wonder that in recent years it's featured so prominently in the *Game of Thrones* TV series. View it from Mt Srd above and you'll understand why poets have so liberally showered it with epithets over the centuries, Byron's 'pearl of the Adriatic' being the most enduring.

Dubrovnik is also an ideal launching pad for expeditions throughout southern Dalmatia. From the island of Korčula in the northwest to the dreamy plains of Konavle in the southeast, this is a region to be savoured by beach seekers, wine lovers and history buffs alike.

## When to Go

### Dubrovnik



**May & Jun** Warm sunny days, without the scorching heat or crowds of mid-summer.

**Jul & Aug** Sate your cultural appetite during Dubrovnik's prestigious Summer Festival.

**Sep & Oct** Still warm enough for swimming and the beaches aren't as crowded.

# DUBROVNIK

POP 28,500

Regardless of whether you are visiting Dubrovnik for the first time or the hundredth, the sense of awe never fails to descend when you set eyes on the beauty of the old town. Indeed it's hard to imagine anyone becoming jaded by the city's marble streets, baroque buildings and the endless shimmer of the Adriatic, or failing to be inspired by a walk along the ancient city walls that have protected a civilised, sophisticated republic for centuries.

Although the shelling of Dubrovnik in 1991 horrified the world, the city has bounced back with characteristic vigour to enchant visitors again. Take the revamped cable car up to Mt Srđ; marvel at the Mediterranean lifestyle and the interplay of light and stone; trace the rise and fall of Dubrovnik in museums replete with art and artefacts; exhaust yourself retracing history – then plunge into the azure sea.

## History

The story of Dubrovnik begins with the 7th-century onslaught of the Slavs that wiped out the Roman city of Epidaurum (site of present-day Cavtat). Residents fled to the safest place they could find, which was a rocky islet (Ragusa) separated from the mainland by a narrow channel. Building walls was a matter of pressing urgency due to the threat of invasion; the city was well fortified by the 9th century when it resisted a Saracen siege for 15 months.

Meanwhile, another settlement emerged on the mainland, stretching from Zaton in the north to Cavtat in the south, and became known as Dubrovnik, named after the *dubrava* (holm oak) that carpeted the region. The two settlements merged in the 12th century, and the channel that separated them was filled in.

By the end of the 12th century Dubrovnik had become an important trading centre on the coast, providing an important link between the Mediterranean and Balkan states. Dubrovnik came under Venetian authority in 1205, finally breaking away from its control in 1358.

By the 15th century the Respublica Ragusina (Republic of Ragusa; Republic of Dubrovnik) had extended its borders to include the entire coastal belt from Ston to Cavtat, having previously acquired Lastovo Island, the Pelješac Peninsula and Mljet

Island. It was now a force to be reckoned with. The city turned towards sea trade and established a fleet of its own ships, which were dispatched to Egypt, the Levant, Sicily, Spain, France and Istanbul. Through canny diplomacy the city maintained good relations with everyone – even the Ottoman Empire, to which Dubrovnik began paying tribute in the 16th century.

Centuries of peace and prosperity allowed art, science and literature to flourish, but most of the Renaissance art and architecture in Dubrovnik was destroyed in the earthquake of 1667, which killed 5000 people and left the city in ruins, with only the Sponza Palace and the Rector's Palace surviving. The earthquake also marked the beginning of the economic decline of the town.

The final coup de grâce was dealt by Napoleon whose troops entered Dubrovnik in 1808 and announced the end of the Republic. The Vienna Congress of 1815 ceded Dubrovnik to Austria; though the city maintained its shipping, it succumbed to social disintegration. It remained a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918 and then slowly began to develop its tourism industry.

Caught in the cross-hairs of the war that ravaged former Yugoslavia, Dubrovnik was pummelled with some 2000 shells in 1991 and 1992, suffering considerable damage. All of the damaged buildings have now been restored.

## Sights

Today Dubrovnik is the most prosperous, elegant and expensive city in Croatia. In many ways it still feels like a city state, isolated from the rest of the nation by geography and history. It's become such a tourism magnet that there's even talk of having to limit visitor numbers in the old town – when several cruise ships disgorge people at the same time the main thoroughfares can get impossibly crowded.

Dubrovnik extends about 6km from north to south. The bulbous leafy promontory of Lapad in the northwest of the city contains many of the town's resorts. All of the sights are in or near the old town, which is entirely closed to cars. Looming above the city is Mt Srđ, which is connected by cable car to Dubrovnik.

Pile Gate is the main entrance to the old town and the terminus for many local buses from Lapad and the bus station.