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The country's long and complex backstory plays a surprisingly large role in the Croatia of today.

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Art, both traditional and contemporary, high- and lowbrow, is a cherished aspect of Croatian culture.

Croatia Today

A couple of years since Croatia entered the European Union (EU), tourism is booming, a positive driving force that is helping bolster Croatia's ailing economy. For nigh on a thousand years, Croatia's fortunes were at the mercy of decisions made in Budapest or Venice or Vienna or Belgrade. Now, with control over its own destiny and no one left to blame except its own politicians, the road to recovery is all its own.

Best on Film

You Only Love Once (*Samo jednom se ljubi*; 1981; Rajko Grlić) Considered one of Croatia's best films, this drama was a Cannes contender.

Cyclops (*Kiklop*; 1982; Antun Vrdoljak) Based on the 1965 namesake novel by Ranko Marinković.

How the War Started on My Island (*Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku*; 1996; Vinko Brešan) An acclaimed black comedy.

Number 55 (*Broj 55*; 2014; Kristijan Milić) The action takes place during Croatia's war of independence.

Best in Print

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon (1941; Rebecca West) Recounts the writer's journeys through the Balkans in 1941.

The Fall of Yugoslavia (1992; Misha Glenny) Explains the collapse of Yugoslavia in a remarkably lucid way.

Cafe Europa – Life After Communism (1996; Slavenka Drakulić) Wittily details Western culture's infiltration of Eastern Europe.

Another Fool in the Balkans (2006; Tony White) White retraces Rebecca West's journey, juxtaposing the region's modern life with its political history.

Settling into the EU

Croatia ticked off a major milestone in July 2013, when the country formally joined the EU following a referendum that passed by a margin of two to one. Yet a great deal of scepticism towards the benefits of the move remained, particularly among the younger generation.

Croatia's farmers and manufacturers no longer enjoy the customs exemptions that were in place with their former Yugoslav neighbours, and are facing stiff competition from EU imports. Foreign companies are also having an impact on the traditional southern Mediterranean way of life, with early starts and finishes in time for big family lunches and afternoon siestas slowly but surely fading away.

Despite this there are signs of an uptick in the economy, with GDP, exports and industrial production all growing. In June 2016, the unemployment rate dropped to 13.6%, the lowest it's been since 2008, though the youth unemployment rate stubbornly remains at over 40%.

In September 2015, eastern Croatia began to experience a major influx of refugees. Hungary had erected a fence on its border with Serbia, making Croatia and Slovenia the most direct route from Serbia to Austria. Over 340,000 people passed through a refugee camp created in November 2015 in Slavonski Brod in eastern Croatia before it was dismantled in April 2016. In March 2016 Croatia had started implementing restrictions on its border with Serbia. In July 2016 Croatia received its first group of asylum seekers under the EU quota.

Booming Tourism

Tourism in Croatia continues to boom. In 2015, 14.1 million travellers visited Croatia (an increase of 8.3% compared to the previous year), and the industry now generates up to 20% of the country's GDP, bringing in around €8 billion annually.