

Croatia

Touted as the 'new this' and the 'new that' for years upon its re-emergence on the world tourism scene, it is now apparent that Croatia is a unique destination that can hold its own, and then some: this is a country with a 1778km-long coast and a staggering 1185 islands. The Adriatic coast is a knockout: its limpid sapphirine waters pull visitors to remote islands, hidden coves and traditional fishing villages while also offering a glitzy beach and yacht scene. Istria is captivating with its gastronomy and wine, and the bars, clubs and festivals of Zagreb, Zadar and Split remain little-explored delights. Eight national parks protect pristine forests, karst mountains, rivers, lakes and waterfalls in a landscape of primeval beauty. Punctuate all this with Dubrovnik in the south, and a country couldn't wish for a better finale.

Sitting on a see-saw between the Balkans and central Europe, Croatia has suffered from something of a love-hate-love affair with the EU. Statistics show that the support for joining the union – once vast and palpable – is lately hovering around the 50% mark, thanks to the already slightly elusive joining date (is it 2010? or 2011? or even 2012?) snagging on a number of hurdles. Developers and investors are more present by the year, but despite this the country has, with few exceptions, managed to keep the lack of (massive) development at bay and maintain the extraordinary beauty of the coast – the very thing that keeps the punters coming for more.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 56,538 sq km
- **Capital** Zagreb
- **Currency** kuna (KN); 1KN = 100 lipa; US\$1 = 5.55KN; UK£1 = 8.08KN; €1 = 7.35KN; A\$1 = 3.74KN
- **Famous for** neckties, Slaven Bilić, Tito
- **Key phrases** *bog* (hello); *doviđenja* (goodbye); *hvala* (thanks); *pardon* (sorry)
- **Official language** Croatian
- **Population** 4.5 million
- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 385; international access code ☎ 00
- **Visas** not necessary for citizens of Australia, Canada, the EU, New Zealand and the USA (see p256)



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Dubrovnik** (p244) A walled old town with luminous marble streets and finely ornamented buildings.
- **Hvar town** (p238) Venetian architecture and vibrant nightlife.
- **Split** (p228) The incredible, lively and historic delights of Diocletian's Palace.
- **Mljet** (p242) Lakes, coves and an island monastery.
- **Rovinj** (p202) Cobbled streets and an unspoilt fishing port.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** After a day in dynamic Zagreb (p180) head down to Split (p227) for a day and night in Diocletian's Palace (p228). Then take a ferry to Hvar (p238), windsurf in Brač (p237) and end with two days in Dubrovnik (p244), taking a day trip to Mljet (p242) or the Elafiti Islands (p248).
- **Two weeks** After two days in Zagreb (p180), head to Rovinj (p202) for a three-day stay, taking day trips to Pula (p204) and Poreč (p199). Head south to Zadar (p220) for a night and then go on to Split (p227) for a night. Take ferries to Hvar (p238), Brač (p237), and then Vis (p237) or Korčula (p240), spending a day or three on each island before ending with three days in Dubrovnik (p244) and a day trip to Mljet (p242).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate varies from Mediterranean along the Adriatic coast, with hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters, to continental inland, with cold winters and warm summers. You can swim in the sea from mid-June until late September. Coastal temperatures are slightly warmer south of Split. See p429 for a Zagreb climate chart.

The peak tourist season runs from mid-July to the end of August. Prices are highest and accommodation scarcest during this period. The best time to be in Croatia is June. The weather is beautiful, the boats and excursions are running often, and it's not yet too crowded. May and September are also good, especially if you're interested in hiking.

HISTORY

In 229 BC the Romans began their conquest of the indigenous Illyrians by estab-

HOW MUCH?

- **Short taxi ride** 60KN
- **Plate of fish stew** 50KN
- **Loaf of bread** 4KN
- **Bottle of house white wine** 40KN
- **Newspaper** 8KN

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 9.65KN
- **Litre of bottled water** 10KN
- **33cL of Karlovačko beer** 12KN
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 90KN
- **Street snack (slice of burek)** 10KN

lishing a colony at Solin (Salona), close to Split in Dalmatia. Emperor Augustus then extended the empire and created the provinces of Illyricum (Dalmatia and Bosnia) and Pannonia (Croatia). In AD 285 Emperor Diocletian decided to retire to his palace fortress in Split, today the greatest Roman ruin in Eastern Europe. When the empire was divided in 395, what are now known as Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina (BiH) stayed with the Western Roman Empire, while present-day Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia went to the Eastern Roman Empire, later known as the Byzantine Empire.

Around 625, Slavic tribes migrated from the Caucasus and the Serbian tribe settled in the region that is now southwestern Serbia. The Croatian tribe moved into what is now Croatia and occupied two former Roman provinces: Dalmatian Croatia along the Adriatic, and Pannonian Croatia to the north.

By the early part of the 9th century both settlements had accepted Christianity, but the northern Croats fell under Frankish domination while Dalmatian Croats came under the nominal control of the Byzantine Empire. The Dalmatian duke Tomislav united the two groups in 925 in a single kingdom that prospered for nearly 200 years.

Late in the 11th century the throne fell vacant and the northern Croats, unable to agree upon a ruler, united with Hungary in 1102 for protection against the Orthodox Byzantine Empire.