

Inland treasures of Croatia

Full of inspiration

Don't fill your life with days, fill your days with life.


Full of life

PHOTOS BY ZORAN JELAČA

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Croatia

Inland Treasures

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Introduction

Croatia hides a secret. A secret that deserves to be revealed. Hidden in the obvious and ready for you. If you really think you deserve a vacation other than the sea or skiing, we suggest that after the daily stresses, the rush and the constant commitment, you finally decide to replace the stone and the sea, the holm oaks and the pines with the shade of Slavonian oak, the ash, the thick forest arch of Gorski Kotar, the greenery of Međimurje... Head, therefore, to that part of our country which is within our reach, green and flat or hilly and golden in its summer or autumn colors, and yet mostly distant and unknown to the most.

Our journey begins in the far east of the country, from Vukovar, Ilok, Kopački rit... Across the mighty Papuk we head west, to Lonjsko polje, and climb north, to Moslavačka Gora and all the way to Međimurje. The journey then takes us south, to Varaždin, Medvednica, Zagreb and to the next crossroad, the city on four rivers - Karlovac. We head west again, where the peace of centuries-old forests of Gorski Kotar awaits. Then the guardian of Istria - Učka appears in front of us and lets us into the region which we will explore on bicycles. From the far west of Croatia, however, we make a turn and head southward. Through Lika we ascend to the mighty Velebit from which we descend towards the Dalmatian hinterland and finally towards the Neretva valley.

The continental part of Croatia and the hinterland of the coastline is an area that will welcome you warmly, with people whose souls are as large as the area in which they live. Small and big hotels await you there, family farms that seem to have emerged from picture books and, above all, genuine hosts.

You will feel the gentleness and the great heart of the area, its tradition, cheerfulness and pride, its wounds, but also the cheerful sounds of the tamburica, flavors and aromas, rich dining tables, heritage and dishes which, like some forgotten treasure, reveal before you, reminding you of the true values of human creation.

You will discover this gold embroidery of continental offer, full of blend of modernity and tradition, spiced up with a good drop of wine and rich history, as an unforgettable and unique holiday that fills your heart and soul.



Kopački rit

NATURE PARK

Oaks and deer 'telling the story'

Numerous pages have already been written about the Kopački rit phenomenon, hours and hours of beautiful videos have been recorded, thousands of stories have been told... But when something is a phenomenon, then it deserves to be given another line, to remind people once again of this unique living picture book of flora and fauna which, although apparently the same, every now and again surprises and amazes those who admire it daily and even those who live in it. Let alone those who visit it for the first time. And for those who haven't done it yet, they can only be advised to correct this mistake very soon and embark on an adventure they will never forget and will gladly return to again and again.

For really, there are few natural habitats such as Kopački Rit in the world, whose waters, willows, spades, oaks, eagles, deer, roe deer, boars, cormorants... have been

telling their own wonderful story for centuries. A story which every traveler can interpret for himself and to his own liking, so it can be a fairy tale but also an adventure novel, it can be a fable as well as a love story. Or maybe a drama, or even a crime story.

The White Water Lily Walking trail

If centuries-old trees of the Tikveš forests could speak, who knows what history would hold today. The history, which in this beautiful landscape was outlined by the nobles of Habsburg and Karađorđević lineages, and later by statesmen like Josip Broz Tito. All of them recognized the wealth of this Baranja pocket located near Osijek. They all knew how to enjoy the benefits of nature offered by Kopački rit. So, how could ordinary people resist it. Especially in the present day of urbanization and

concretization, which restrain fields, meadows and forests, tame waters...

Kopački rit can also be seen today as an incident that persistently defies human efforts to steal it from nature, which is certainly contributed by the fact that it was proclaimed a Nature Park and as such is protected from destruction or any kind of devastation.

To come to eastern Croatia and not spend at least one day visiting this European Amazon is an unforgivable sin against nature, which left us the heritage of this beautiful pearl to preserve. A pearl which is only a 13-minute drive away from urban Osijek or, if you prefer, an easy one-hour bike ride from the reception center along Mali Sakadaš Lake.

Here, on the wooden White Water Lily Walking trail, which is 2400 meters

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The unique world of flora and fauna is a place where about 260 different species of birds nest. Along with white-tailed eagles, there are also black and white storks, herons, ducks, coots, turtles, frogs and, of course, mosquitoes

long and set above the water, at the very beginning you get a glimpse of what awaits visitors in the rest of the Park, in the rest of this great swamp.

In addition to the beautiful scenery, there are educational panels with pictures and descriptions of plants and animals and all the characteristics of this habitat, which tell about the richness of this ecosystem.

“The Swan” and “The Otter” will guide you

An easy walk will take you to the docks and boats which will take you deeper into the park to explore the primordial nature.

Sailing on boats conveniently named “The Swan” and “The Otter” or boats sailed by park rangers, through marshes, bayous between the shoals and islets, is so relaxing that one wishes it would never stop.

Here you can see breathtaking scenery created by water in this flood area by depositing silt in one place, while deepening the terrain in another, giving thus the whole area a wavy appearance.

Such activity of water led to the formation of ponds, that is, depressions and beams, elevated areas, which give Kopački rit the shape of a delta. And this is perhaps the biggest phenomenon of Kopački rit. The big and powerful brother Danube, with the help of his sister the Drava river, creates the so-called inner delta, which gives this area a worldwide significance.

This is especially distinctive during flood season, when this habitat is filled with waters of the two rivers that surround it, which makes sailing across Veliki Sakadaš Lake and the largest Kopačko Jezero pure pleasure, with white-tailed eagles, which became a trademark of this natural phenomenon, flying above you and cormorants in a blasting flight

fishing in rich waters, and a few minutes later “attack” the willow trees and peck their bark.

Deer roar

Constant changes in water levels make this complex ecosystem interesting in any season, however, most visitors come in spring and autumn. In autumn bird migrations begin, so visitors can see more birds feeding more intensively in the shallow waters of the Park, preparing for the long journey to the south and gathering in flocks.

At the end of August, the deer mating season begins and lasts throughout September. Males roar guarding their territory and warning rivals not to approach. In the “Deer roar” program, visitors have the opportunity to follow the sound of their roar and enjoy watching these beautiful animals from a decent distance and take a photo as a unique souvenir from the park. This unique world of flora and fauna will equally delight you whether you explore it from boats or by cycling or walking. About 260 different species of birds nest

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here, for many of which this a temporary habitat on their migration from cold to warmer regions. Along with the already mentioned white-tailed eagle, there are also black and white storks, herons, ducks, coots, turtles, frogs and, of course, mosquitoes... There are more than 40 species of fish in waters of Kopački rit, while the forests hide the true treasure of game such as deer with golden antlers, roe deer and fawns, boars, beavers, otters, martens... Often you will also encounter some wild animals there.

The Tikveš castle complex

Local vegetation is also a special story. Ultimately, Kopački Rit itself is a great and special story to be experienced, smelled, felt with your fingers and felt under your feet... Surely the Tikveš castle complex should not be forgotten. The complex consists of residential buildings surrounded by forests and gardens - castles, chapels and accompanying objects which for centuries were a residential hunting ground for local, European and world princes, kings and statesmen who came here as guests of the Habsburgs, the Karađorđevićs and Tito.

- | 1. Kopački rit/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
- | 2. Kopački rit/ Goran Šafarek
- | 3. Tikveš Castle/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
- | 4. Kopački rit/ Ivo Biočina
- | 5. Kopački rit/ Ivo Biočina
- | 6. Kopački rit/ Saša Pjanić
- | 7. Kopački rit/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
- | 8. Kopački rit/ Ivo Biočina
- | 9. Kopački rit Nature Park/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
- | 10. Kopački rit/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
- | 11. Baranja, Kopački rit/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
- | 12. Kopački rit/ Ivo Biočina



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Vukovar

CITY OF EMOTIONS

History of civilization on the Danube banks

Vukovar. The very mention of the name of this town arouses special emotions. And so it will be forever. For, the war tragedy of this baroque pearl located on the banks of the Danube and Vuka will be forever imprinted in Croatian history.

Vukovar is the site of a special piety, with numerous memorial sites of Homeland War, which cannot be avoided by those who want to know what happened in this town during the three most difficult months of its rich history. But at the same time, Vukovar is also a town which has a lot to show beyond war-related topics, a town that, with its immediate surroundings, prides itself on its rich history. On the site of today's Vukovar, world standards were imposed even in the early Stone Age, which positions its present to the throne of globally important historical localities.

Numerous civilizations left their mark on this area and further developed it, making it more important, stronger and more powerful.

The world's first bronze and the oldest European saw

Vukovar has been an important center of life and the intersection of roads throughout its history to present day. Vukovar is a town that offers every traveler an incredible historical story. Vukovar is a living encyclopedia of civilization. The best confirmation of this claim is given by the Museum of Vučedol Culture, a phenomenal space located in the most important site of the Eneolithic and dedicated to a single, 5,000-year-old culture, whose civilizational achievements have strongly influenced 13 European countries. The importance of Vučedol culture is best testified by

the fact that the first batch production of metal objects was recorded here - for example, 45 axes with a hole for the handle, each weighing 923 grams, the world's first bronze, the oldest European saw... This remarkable technological world is particularly reflected in the widest range of ceramic products that are at least three times as numerous as in the cultures that preceded it and in those which are its successors.

Mala Ada - a paradise in the shade

The dove of Vučedol, a symbol of Vukovar was found here in 1938. Recent history, however, gave the town a beautiful baroque center as a unique architectural ensemble and recognizable features as well as the imposing Eltz Castle.

The center of old Vukovar is recognizable by its houses with baroque arches, built

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in the typical Maria Theresia provincial baroque style. There used to be craft workshops and shops here that spoke eloquently of the economic power of the wealthier layer of Vukovar citizens.

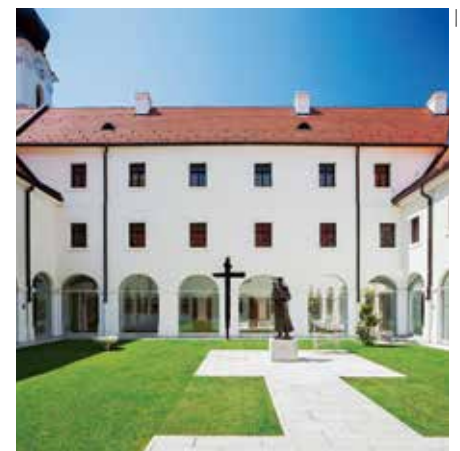
At the time of construction of Stari Vukovar during the 18th century, with its distinctive baroque stylistic features, the development of Novi Vukovar was also in progress. Most of the buildings in that part of the city on the left bank of the Vuka river, which at this point forms the natural boundary of Slavonia and Srijem, bear the marks of pure and restrained late Baroque classicism. The rounded Baroque ensemble has remained the dominant style of historic Vukovar to this day, with numerous architectural monuments of extremely great artistic and space value.

Count Eltz's family castle, itself a historical monument located in the most beautiful possible location next to the Danube, today houses the Vukovar Town Museum with numerous collections, the most valuable being the Bauer collection with the most complete collection of modern Croatian art from the late 19th and the early 20th centuries.

The museum was awarded the European Silletto Award for the Best European Museum in 2016. For those who crave nature there is a beautiful Adica Forest Park, which can be reached on foot and by bike, enjoying the charms of the forest and other recreational and catering facilities.

For a special experience of the Danube, Vukovar and its sights, a panoramic boat is a great choice. Vukovar has the advantage that the main sights are located along the the Danube banks so on a panoramic boat tour the town can be fully experienced from another perspective.

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And in the summer months, Vukovar sandy island of Mala Ada provides refreshment, bathing and socializing in the shade, far from the hot concrete. Of course, the unavoidable part of this story are the memorial sites united by the name "Vukovar Nocturne", as a symbol of the defense and suffering of Croatia in the Homeland War.

It is a sad story that unites all the memorial sites in the city: Memorial site - Vukovar Hospital 1991, Ovčara - Memorial Home and Mass Tomb, Homeland War Victims Memorial Cemetery, Central

For a special experience of the Danube, Vukovar and its sights, a panoramic boat ride is a great choice. Vukovar has the advantage that the main sights are located along the Danube banks, so the city can be fully experienced from another perspective

Cross at the mouth of the Vuka River in the Danube, Homeland War Memorial Center in Vukovar Barracks and finally Vukovar Water Tower - a symbol of Croatian unity. There are numerous reasons for visiting Vukovar.

Culture can be one of them, because in addition to the mentioned museums,

there is also the newly opened Franciscan Museum Vukovar in the Franciscan monastery of St. Philip and James, as well as the birthplace of the first Croatian Nobel laureate, Dr. Lavoslav Ružička, whose life and work can be explored through holograms.

| 1. Vukovar/ Matija Šćulac | 2. Vukovar/ Ivo Biočina | 3. Eltz Castle/ Saša Pjanić | 4. Eltz Castle/ Filip Beusan | 5. Vukovarska Ada/ Aleksandar Gospić | 6. Water Tower, Vukovar/ Ivo Biočina | 7. Vukovar/ Saša Pjanić | 8. Franciscan monastery, Vukovar/ Filip Beusan | 9. The Museum of Vučedol Culture/ Darko Puharić | 10. Vukovar/ Matija Šćulac | 11. The Museum of Vučedol culture/ Lucija Župančić | 12. Memorial cemetery/ Matija Šćulac

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*From Ilok
to Vukovar*

SLAVONIA

All the deliciousness of the world in a plain

From Ilok, Erdut and Vukovar, then back through the plains of Slavonia, will have you in awe of the width of the fertile plains and the generosity of the locals. The Pannonian sailors have a soul as great as the area they inhabit. Ducats, daughter-in-laws, the tambura, the bećarac, horses and rich dining tables are an eternal and everlasting presence of living in rich, villages with houses lined along the road, equally interesting in the summer and when covered in snow in winter. Croatia's easternmost town of Ilok, the center of the western Sarmia, was dubbed by the old Romans as the "Relish of the world" or "Delicium mundi". The tourist town of Ilok, which once again returned to its great traditions after war traumas, has been the capital of wines and a producer of royal wines for hundreds of years.

In the medieval core of Old Ilok be sure to drop by the unique Old Cellar., a rarity even by world standards, which is visited by more than twenty thousand tourists annually. It is unique for its architecture and technological solutions.

A cellar 12 meters under the ground

What makes it so special? Here's its story. In the seventeenth century, the Ilok estate was given by Pope Innocent XI to the Italian aristocratic Odescalchi family as a present. They renewed the 15th century castle and, under it, built an impressive wine cellar. In its cold areas, in the wooden barrels, there are a million liters of top quality wine maturing. The greatest part of the cellar is 12 meters under the ground where



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the temperatures is always between 10 to 12 degrees.

It is this very cellar of Old Ilok that had 11 000 bottles of top class Ilok wine delivered to the English castle for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, exposed even today in the British royal collection of wines. Don't forget to taste their top quality Traminac, Graševina, Chardonnaye, Sauvignone, take a walk on the slopes of Fruška Gora, along the right cost of Danube. The hundreds of acres of Syrmia vineyards are a particular pleasure to explore.

Vineyards dating back to the third century

Ilok was actually born with wine. In the third century, the Roman emperor Probus initiated viticulture and built the Cuccium fort from which the Ilok of today grew. The medieval town of Erdut is a lovely nearby stop, located about a hundred meters above the coast of the

Croatia's easternmost town of Ilok, the center of the western Syrmia, was dubbed by the old Romans as the Relish of the world” or “Delicium mundi”. The Danube tourist town of Ilok has been the capital of wine and a producer of royal wines for over hundreds of years

Danube. Take a walk to the medieval towers of the old town which collapsed into the Danube in the old days. The inhabitants of Erdut are madly in love with their city and will love to tell you everything about it. It is particularly loved by fishermen who have found in Erdut their favorite place to fish.

The biggest barrel in Europe

You will find many wine lovers here, too, mostly around one of the largest barrels in Europe. Its size and beautiful carvings and equally fine Erdut wine maturing in it continue to amaze the visitors of Erdut. The barrel, decorated by naive sculptors Tijardović and Fodor, is adorned with two and a half tons of steel and magnificent carvings of the Croatian

wattle and the Last Supper with Jesus holding the wine chalice.

The biggest barrel in Europe holds a staggering 75 000 liters of wine. It is made of 150 years old oak and is part of the Guinness book of records. Erdut, as well as Ilok, is proud of its wine cellars. The cellar of Erdut is 300 years old and dates back to the days of count Erving Čeh. Legend has it that, while escaping from his wife, the count hid in one of the big barrels of the cellar where he played cards with his friends.

Take a seat on the bank of the Danube in Vukovar, and its locals will tell you the amazing story of Orion and the oldest inhabitants of the Vučedol valley. Take the Vučedol dove with you as a souvenir,



there is nothing better. Visit the lovely sand beach on Orlov otok (Eagle's Island). Along the coast of the river Vuka and the Danube, you will meet swimmers and many fishermen who spend hours with carps, catfish, pikes...

There are only about thirty kilometers from the seductive Art-Nouveau city of Osijek. Or to get the real idea and charm of Slavonia, head to Vinkovci or the village of Otok. You will be offered the čobanac, spicy kulen and kulenova seka (kulen's sister) sausage, cracklings, or a tasty bread with a spread of lard sprinkled with red paprika, or švargle (the crush), not to mention the out of this world fish-paprikash.

The steamboat quay

On the Ilok side of the Danube, there used to be a steamboat port more than 100 years ago, which was rebuilt after the Homeland War. Today, this port is a part of a recreational and tourist facility together with the promenade, beach, hotel and quay for passenger ships (cruising ships).

Everything is within easy reach: gastronomy and wine, fishing, walking, cycling, swimming, tennis courts, the Danube cycle routes, the Liska footpath and the Sultans trail (hiking route), boat ride or a unique opportunity for a ride on the river boat.



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| 1. Principovac/ Saša Pjanić | 2. The vineyards of Erdut/ Matija Šćulac | 3. Ilok, Ivo Biočina
 | 4. Ilok Cellars/ Siniša Uštulica | 5. Ilok Cellars/ Siniša Uštulica | 6. Ilok/ Ivo Biočina | 7. Erdut/ Ivo Biočina
 | 8. Ilok Cellars/ Ivo Biočina | 9. Kutjevo Cellars/ Siniša Uštulica | 10. The Danube/ Ivo Biočina
 | 11. Erdut, fields/ Mario Hlača | 12. Baranja/ Domagoj Blažević | 13. Hotel Dunav/ Siniša Uštulica
 | 14. Snašini kučari/ Siniša Uštulica | 15. Sunflower/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić | 16. Karanac/ Nina Đurđević



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A close-up photograph of a black plate filled with several slices of cured meat, likely prosciutto or speck, served on slices of dark bread. The meat is sliced thin, showing a marbled texture of fat and meat. The bread is dark and appears to be a traditional rye or pumpernickel. The plate is set on a dark, textured surface, possibly a wooden table. In the background, a blurred red plate contains more food, including what looks like a whole roasted pepper and some green herbs. The overall lighting is warm and focused on the foreground plate.

Eastern Croatia

EMBRACED BY RIVERS

All the delicacies of the world in the kulen sausage and carp

The cuisine of the east of Croatia will have every traveler in awe of its simplicity and ingenuity. It is therefore no surprise that the well-known Slavonian hospitality will welcome you with a pig roasted on a spit, trganci (a type of pasta tatters) with cheese and čvarci (a type of bacon crisps), homemade bread, kulen and spicy sausage made of an autochthonous Fajfer pig. You will also be able to enjoy other numerous delicacies from the cauldron, such as fish papirkash or a traditional meat stew called čobanac, dried carp or carp prepared over an open fire, all well-seasoned with ground red paprika. Before you know it, you will be served the famous Ilok ćevap, of Turkish name and with a Hungarian sauce, and golden yellow cornbread bazlamača with black plum jam. Last but not least, is the endless list of dishes made from chicken soup with homemade noodles and listarići (the so called torn pants fritters),

not to mention masnica, the poppy seed or walnut roll and kirbaj cookies.

Kulen

There are two main types of kulen - from Slavonia and Baranja, the latter one containing along with meat, garlic, sweet and hot paprika and salt also white pepper. To make the kulen 90 % of top quality meat is used – thighs, cutlet and tenderloin, and the remaining 10% is good quality fat, i.e. fat from pigs of extended fattening; from 160 to 170 kg, anything above that reduces the quality of meat. There are of course many recipes and cooking methods, one of which is to smoke the stuffed kulens with cold smoke on hornbeam, ash and beech wood for they are white trees and do not contain tannic acid and resin. The ideal conditions in which they mature include 75 to 85% humidity and a temperature not higher than 15 degrees Celsius.

In November 2017 the European Commission approved the request for the EU geographical protection status of “Slavonski kulen”/ Slavonski kulin”. The same request was approved for “Branjski kulen” in September 2015.

When meat is stuffed into smaller intestines, kulen is called Kulenova seka (Kulen's sister). The content is the same as in kulen, but the smoking period is shorter because of the smaller intestine and can therefore be eaten sooner.

Carp on a forked branch/over an open fire

Carp on a forked branch is a special delicacy, looks very appealing and you should try it at least once. For the forked branches it is important they do not damage the skin of the fish and that all the gut is thoroughly removed in order to





The cuisine of the east of Croatia will have every traveler in awe of its simplicity and ingenuity.

get clean meat. Pay special attention to the bitter stone in the head of the carp just under the gill that needs to be removed to lose the bitter taste. Spices traditionally include only salt, although some add a little oil and paprika. Apply plenty of salt on the skin and meat of the fish because the fish will only “take” what it needs. The dish takes a little more than a half an hour to be ready to eat but be careful to turn the fish over when the skin becomes crisp

Fiš / freshwater fish stew

It is said that fish swim three times, once in the Danube, then in a cauldron, and finally in wine so make sure you accompany your Fiš with a good bottle of wine. If you are a lover of white wine, Riesling is the best choice, and for red wine lovers a glass of Cuvee. The most important ingredient of a good Fiš is, of course, the fish and good quality ground paprika. It is usually made from carp or pike, but Prussian carp can also be added for sweetness. Never stir the Fiš because the delicate fish meat will fall apart, only gently shake the cauldron

(like when preparing Brudet, the sea fish stew). As for the dough, the best choice is homemade noodles.

Čvarci

Almost every household in Slavonia makes Čvarci from melted pork fat. It is interesting to note that once traditional drying and smoking of carp is considered of reviving, seeing it is good as dried meat, so why not make “čvarci” as well. In any case, they are extremely difficult to make at home, so it would be best to ask the locals where to buy them, and then nibble on them in the privacy of your home when you want to go back to the days spent in Slavonia.

Tačkrle

“Little bags” or “pillows” made of potato dough and are commonly filled with plum jam, but those filled with poppy, walnuts or cream are also popular. Tačkrle, tačci, taške or tačke are one of those dishes that take us back to our childhood when they were a must on our grandma’s dinner table.



| 1. Kulen / Maja Danica Pečanić | 2. Budrovci/ Ivo Biočina | 3. Karanac/ Ivo Biočina | 4. Salenjaci/ Maja Danica Pečanić | 5. Vinogradarski čevap/ Siniša Uštulica | 6. Budrovci/ Ivo Biočina | 7. Meso iz tiblice/ Maja Danica Pečanić | 8. Čvarci/ Marija Danica Pečanić | 9. Karanac/ Ivo Biočina | 10. Međimurje/ Damir Fabijanić | 11. Fiš paprikaš/ Nina Đurđević | 12. Sarma/ Maja Danica Pečanić | 13. Čobanac stew/ Maja Danica Pečanić | 14. Slavonian dinning table/ Nina Đurđević



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Papuk



GEOPARK

Enjoy the shade of centennial beech and fir trees

In the heart of Slavonia, on the surface of 336 square kilometers there is a place for a perfect escape from the summer madness, overcrowded beaches, hot nights and even hotter days – the Papuk Nature Park, named after the 953-meter high mountain located there. Centennial trees offer not only shade, but create a primordial atmosphere for everyone to enjoy.

Forest-like atmosphere is best seen in the 150 years old beech and fir tree forest, enriched by a special forest vegetation reservoir – Sekulina mountain. It is located in the area of Gudonga at an altitude between 740 and 820 meters.

The very pleasant 20ish degrees (sometimes even less) are a pure bliss in the middle of summer. But Papuk has much more to offer.

In September 2007 it became the first geo-park in Croatia. This is a hill and mountain area of Slavonia, area of exceptional biological and geological diversity, with an equally rich cultural and historical heritage.

Impressive caves

Nature is the one which takes the breath away. From the streams of Brzaja, Velinka, Dubočanka and Kovačica to Orahovica, Jankovac and Zvečevo lakes, and over the caves and waterfalls to the Rupnica geological monument of nature. This is the first geological monument of nature in Croatia, proclaimed due to the exceptionally rare morphological formation of volcanic rocks which (as the name says it) look like columns, in Dalmatia some might think it resembles a slightly abstract stairway (which as such can only be found in Ireland and

Wyoming in North America). It is worth mentioning the Dubočanka stream, with its valley in which there are natural thermal springs with water heated at 28 degrees...

One of the most attractive destinations within the park is the Jankovac Park Forest. It is located at an altitude of 475 meters and is considered one of the most beautiful mountain valleys.

Rich in cold springs and clear streams, its borders are guarded by centennial beech trees. No wonder this forest was named a protected Park Forest way back in 1955... Also worth visiting are the caves (the grave of count Jankovic and the cave of Maxim), and the crown jewels you can enjoy is a 30 meter high travertine barrier of the Skakavac waterfall. The moss which make travertine and algae have created a true masterpiece of nature



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over thousands of years. During the cold winter, the waterfall often freezes which brings you into a true frozen fairytale.

The Jankovac Park Forest also has a mountain lodge which is the main meeting point for all visitors and hikers. In its vicinity there are two artificial lakes connecting the spring in the cave and the waterfall, as well as an educational trail for those who wish to know more about the natural, cultural and historical features of Papuk.

500 years old oak tree

Papuk is home to two true giants, giants by size and age. In the "Old oaks" monument of nature there are two sessile oaks. They are over 33 meters tall and dominate the area and are between 420 and 500 years old. The other one, with more than a half a century on its branches is also the oldest inhabitant of Papuk. They are located 400 meters from the county road Kamenska -Vocin, northeast from the point where you have to make a turn to get to the Dedovica hunting lodge. They grow in a very unusual environment, in the beech and

fir forest which doesn't offer the best ecological conditions for the sessile oak. Now that we have mentioned the oldest and the biggest, we must mention the rarest ones. The "Stanište tisa" (Yew habitat) monument of nature - people can find about ten remaining trees and protected plants in the Debeljak forest area, northwest from Zvečevo. Yew is, for those who don't know, one of the most precious trees, and although there are several areas on Papuk with toponyms such as Tisovac, Tisov potok, Tisica, there are no yew trees found there. In the summer, hikers can enjoy the pools with thermal water in Velika and Orahovac Lake. In winter, although there are no ski resorts, fans of winter activities can enjoy this sport or sledging.

From sports climbing to medieval towns

Those who are more into adrenalin activities, can enjoy the Sokoline climbing site which offers great training for sports climbing. Papuk offers around 104 kilometers of cycling lanes, the before mentioned Grofova staza educational trail and Lapjak which leads

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to the Pliša paragliding site. Nature has made Papuk very attractive, but man has contributed to its beauty as well. The area of Papuk has seven medieval towns (!) of which the best preserved are Ružica grad, Veliki grad, Kamengrad, Stari grad and Klak. Ružica grad is generally one of the best preserved medieval noble towns in Croatia. It is located about 300 meters from the town of Orahovica. Not far from Ružica grad, at a slightly higher altitude there are remains of another town whose name is unknown. The locals simply called it Stari grad (the Old town), but considering the lack of historical evidence, its real name and purpose remain unknown.

Shell as a symbol

16 million years ago Papuk was an island in the Pannonian Sea in which rhinos walked and around which an extinct shark species swam. Numerous fossils of formerly living organisms, mostly marine animals, testify to the ancient past of this "Slavonian archipelago", which in Velika, within the Nature Park Papuk, has a new, impressive exhibition - the House of the Pannonian Sea. This

visitor-education center opened in 2019, is part of the already existing Visitor Center in Velika. On an area of 158 square meters, in addition to the exhibition halls, there are multifunctional classrooms for interactive lectures, a gift shop and an outdoor classroom. There you will see firsthand why the park symbol is a fossil - an ammonite shell.

1. Papuk, Jankovac/ Ivo Biočina
2. Skakavac waterfall, Jankovac/ Alan Čaplar
3. Tauberove stijene/ Alan Čaplar
4. Jankovac Lake/ Alan Čaplar
5. Jankovac mountain lodge/ Alan Čaplar
6. Stari grad, Velika / Alan Čaplar
7. Papuk, Ružica grad/ Ivo Biočina
8. Papuk/ Mario Romulić, Dražen Stojčić
9. Velika/ Alan Čaplar
10. Hiking trail Grofova staza, Jankovac/ Alan Čaplar
11. Duboka/ Alan Čaplar
12. Jankovac mountain lodge/ Alan Čaplar



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A herd of horses of various colors (brown, grey, white) running through a grassy field. The horses are wearing red halteres. The background is a dense forest of green trees. The word "Požega" is written in white cursive script across the middle of the image.

Požega

GOLDEN VALLEY

Rest for the eyes, pleasure of the palate

Požega Valley, in a nutshell, is golden because it's - green. When you get off the highway at Nova Gradiška exit from the direction of Zagreb, everything you see is bathed, immersed or painted green.

And as this color rests your eyes, you will return home from your holiday with perfect eyesight. You will also rest your body and soul. For, the Golden Valley may be golden as far as natural resources are concerned, but when it comes to tourism, it is a true – unpolished jewel. An undiscovered golden vein, that keeps its secrets deep underground.

The glorious early history gave way to a difficult, recent history of war. Consequently, the entire Požega region is still recovering, and tourism has been recognized as one of the guiding stars towards the economic and social well-being.

Let's get back to the road from Nova Gradiška to Požega. The sun is high, the asphalt is almost new, and some parts of the road are in the thick shade. If there is anywhere a road ideal for some kind of rally, this might be just it.

Visit Count's well

But cars aside, horses are actually the real stars of the Golden Valley. And one of the unavoidable places worth visiting in Požega region is certainly the State Stud Farm Lipik. You have already guessed, the stars are tall, white and extremely prized Lipizzaner horses. After all, Lipik is the town they are named after. In addition to seeing these animal beauties live in Lipik, you can also take a carriage ride in the town center, through the town park to the Count's Well, which is worth a visit.

Namely, one of the first thermal water wells in this part of Europe was drilled (by hand) in Lipik in 1870. This well is known today as Antun's Well or the Count's Well. Just five years later, in 1875, the first thermal water bottles saw the light of day.

Until 1993, "Lipički Studenac" was the only natural mineral water of domestic production on the Croatian market. Medicinal water helps with skin diseases and generally contributes to health, and those who have tasted it describe it as warm, bubble-free mineral water.

Rural tourism is very active in the Golden Valley, especially in Kutjevo area. If you love wine, and by this we don't mean just to drink it, but to love it from the vine to the glass, and want to know as much as possible about it, then Kutjevo is the place for you. It is known



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for its rich vineyards and great wines, produced by top local wine makers who have won great world awards for their wines. Kutjevo is the oldest wine establishment in the area and in the old Kutjevo basement there is a "mom of top-quality Kutjevo riesling" - an impressive oak barrel with the capacity of 53,520 liters. At one time it was one of the largest in the world. That is why Kutjevo represents a world that is just waiting for wine lovers to discover it.

Good drinks require good food and the Golden Valley fulfills its gastronomic promise of excellent, delicious and interesting food. You just need to indulge yourself and engage in an amazing gastronomic exploration.

- | 1. Lipik/ Ivo Biočina
- | 2. Zlatni Lug, Požega/ Ivo Biočina
- | 3. Lipik/ Siniša Uštulica
- | 4. Požega/ Ivo Biočina
- | 5. Požega/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 6. Požega/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 7. Požega/ Ivo Biočina
- | 8. Požega/ Sergio Gobbo
- | 9. Požega/ Ivo Biočina

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A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a flooded plain. In the foreground, a large, leafy green bush stands partially submerged in dark blue water. The middle ground is a vast, flat expanse of water and wetland, where a herd of horses of various colors (brown, black, white) is grazing. The background features a dense line of green trees under a bright, slightly hazy sky. The text 'Lonjsko polje' is overlaid in a white, cursive font across the middle of the image.

Lonjsko polje

NATURE PARK

The Sava river dictates life and stops time

With the changing of seasons, Lonjsko polje changes its face. Therefore, if you have visited this nature park only once, it is definitely not enough because each face of this area tells a different story. In wintertime, when the snow falls, little villages such as Kratečko, Trebež and Krapje become pathways into a magical world and just like the closets in Narnia, lead you into a flake covered forest where each step takes you further away from the reality filled with stress and worry. Animals will be your only companions, maybe a Turopolje pig in search of a fallen acorn or birds that haven't fled to the warm south. Once the snow is melted, Lonjsko polje opens a new page filled with flowers. Springs brings back migratory birds, storks in particular which are the park's trademark. A short ride along a narrow road through Čigoč makes it clear why this place is

named "The European stork village". In fact, there isn't a house roof without at least one nest that welcomes these birds, which have become the symbol of eternal love between two partners.

Summer, on the other hand, brings warmer weather and more opportunities to explore the park – by bike, on foot in hiking or tennis shoes, on a small boat, kayak, on a horseback, or maybe through binoculars.

These are some of the ways to discover the secrets of spacious plains and forests of Lonjsko polje. This leaves us with autumn, a season when the elderly recall the way life once was in this area. Reminders of those times are easily found in each step. In the fields where grandmas and grandpas accompanied by Posavina horses pick corn, in small houses with no chimneys, and

in national costumes, each unique in its own way. Several guardians of memories have turned their houses into an ethnological collection of objects which today seem like relics to us and for previous inhabitants of Lonjsko polje they were everyday objects.

The only constant presence in these four stories is the river Sava which, in a way, rules the area. It has always dictated the way of life for people and animals here, depending on its mood reflected in different water levels and floods that may occur at any time of year. However, not even the Sava is immune to the fairies of the seasons so it always adds something new to the story of Lonjsko polje. After lyrical descriptions, it is time to touch on some of the facts that also tell us about this Nature Park. With the surface of 50, 650 acres Lonjsko polje is the

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largest protected wetland not only in Croatia, but in the entire Danube basin, and is among the most endangered wetlands in the world. It is located in the alluvial plain of the river Sava in its central basin, between the towns of Sisak and Stara Gradiška. Although the name might indicate there is only one big field, there are in fact three – Lonjsko, Mokro and Poganovo polje .

Just as there are three lakes, there are also three entrances into this Nature Park. One is in the village called Čigoč, the second in Krapje, and the third in Repušnica, each offering different experiences. Let's start with Čigoč, a village that in 1994 officially became the first European stork village. What is more, there are more white storks than there are inhabitants here and according to the number of nests, the area has the most numerous population of storks in the whole of Europe. Each of these nests weighs about a hundred kilograms. For instance, the house which is one of the info points of the Park used to be home to a nest as heavy as 900 kilograms! Looking at those small houses it is difficult to believe they can sustain such weight, but the

wooden houses of Posavina hide many secrets in their wooden structure. Namely, the houses of Posavina have a very particular type of structure, they are made of common oak and are built as Lego cubes. If you take a better look, you will see that the boards, i.e. planks, are marked in numbers. This was done so that they could easily be disassembled and assembled in view of the flooded nature of Lonjsko polje which was constantly under water before the dams were built. The locals would then move their houses to higher altitudes and then return them to their original locations. This can be verified by house numbers because some of the houses have two addresses. Because some of the houses wouldn't be returned to their original locations, they would get a new house number.

The real secret of the durability of these houses is the lack of a chimney. The first houses were built during the Austro-Hungarian Empire when there were taxes on windows and chimneys, so less well-off inhabitants built houses with small windows and no chimneys. The absence of chimneys didn't mean there were no stoves. Villagers would

release the smoke coming out of it into the attic where they would dry their meat, cheese and fish. The smoke would also destroy the wormholes on the roof and by doing so condense it making it even stronger for sustaining the nests of several hundred kilograms.

This type of construction is specific to a great number of houses in Posavina, but particularly in Krapje, the only Croatian village of architectural heritage, where the European Heritage Days have traditionally been marked since 1995. This small village is not unique only in Croatia, but in the rest of the world as well, due to its traditional wooden architecture in an environment of flooded plains with houses organized in lines. Although small, these houses could easily provide home for a family of 10. Actually, they had to. A hundred years ago all members of the family slept upstairs, and they dined on the ground floor. They spent very little time in the house, though.

They spent most of their time outdoors, in the fields. The only time they would spend days in these small houses with tiny windows was wintertime. What



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life was like at the time is known to the elderly in Lonjsko polje. In Čigoč there is the third greatest ethnological collection of traditional object in all of Europe, a testimony to the life once lived. There are over 700 objects, among which are forks from the World War I and wooden tools for removing boots without using hands. There is also the “feder vagl” - a horse wagon used only in special occasions such as christenings and weddings, along with other everyday objects like milk pots, small cannons, school wooden pencil cases and wooden weights.

During winter, men used to lift weights to stay in shape. When talking about Lonjsko polje, we must mention the rich fauna. The Park is habitat for over 250 species of birds, 134 of which nest there. Among the most famous ones is of course the stork, followed by the white-tailed eagles, saker falcons, ferruginous ducks, and many others. Two locations inside the Park, Krapje Dol and Rakita were declared reservoirs, Krapje Dol being the first reservoir in Croatia. Not surprisingly, the most

popular activity in Lonjsko polje is birdwatching. Repušnica has a special programme dedicated to the corn crake bird - a tireless meadow singer, as the locals call it. Namely, it hides and nests in high grass, and its location can be detected by the gentle swaying of grass blades and a specific sound. Other than birds, Lonjsko polje is an area with the highest concentration of autochthonous breeds in Croatia. Here, you can still find the Croatian Posavac horse, a breed that was believed to have become extinct. There is also the Slavonian-Syrmian cattle breeds characterized by a grey coat and long horns which resemble the Istrian boškarin, as well as the Turopolje pig. They can all be seen on the endless meadows and pastures of the Nature Park, carelessly lying amongst the trees or bathing in the big puddles of water remaining after the overflowing Sava.

Actually, the entire area looks as if it has long been preserved under the glass bell, as if time has stopped. This is best seen in the symbiotic relationship between people, animals and nature

which nowadays is a phenomenon difficult to experience. That is why, apart from the day, one has to spend the night here in the traditional houses inhabited by the locals a hundred years ago. No matter what season you choose to visit Lonjsko polje, it will always welcome you with something fantastic.

| 1. Lonjsko polje Nature Park/ Zoran Jelača | 2. Lonjsko polje Nature Park / Zoran Jelača | 3. Lonjsko polje/ Bojan Haron Markičević | 4. Lonjsko polje/ Zoran Jelača | 5. Lonjsko polje/ Davor Rostuhar | 6. Krapje/ Roman Martin | 7. Lonjsko polje/ Zoran Jelača | 8. Lonjsko polje/ Ivo Biočina | 9. Lonjsko Polje/ Bojan Haron Markičević

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A vibrant forest scene featuring a dense canopy of green trees. In the foreground, a field of small white flowers is in bloom, interspersed with fallen brown leaves. The text 'Moslavačka gora' is overlaid in a white, cursive font across the center of the image.

Moslavačka gora

E-BIKE

Worth every drop of sweat

My legs are no longer heavy, the road is finally flat, and the sun is shyly peeking behind the clouds. To my right is the dense forest of Moslavačka gora, to my left a babbling stream is turning into a waterfall. I think that was the moment, somewhere on the 15th kilometer of the E-bike challenge on Moslavačka gora, when I realized how beautiful and simple life really is. The head is empty, the stress of everyday life is away, there's just me, the forest and my two e-wheels. This is what physical exertion does to a person, especially when it alternates with bursts of adrenaline, when you are surrounded by nature as it once was, before the human hand began to intervene in it in cold blood.

The moment of a complete zen state of mind occurred to me about halfway through the route we had been riding on electric bicycles, a small group of enthusiasts, under the watchful eye of experienced guides. At the end of the five-hour adventure, we proudly watched the total figures: 37.5 kilometers remained under our wheels, of which almost a kilometer was on a steep hill.

An inspiring story

So, I found myself on one such tour. In mediocre physical shape, with no idea of how an electric bike works (to tell the truth, I secretly hoped that it would ride uphill instead of me), and most sadly, with no idea of how beautiful this part of Croatia was, that somehow had always slipped under my radar.

We gathered at Villa Garić in Podgarić, a picnic area owned by a local hunting association and which is about an hour drive away from Zagreb. With coffee and rolls, we met our guides and other participants. There were three of us, and a couple from Slavonski Brod who decided to celebrate the 29th anniversary of their marriage on this adventure - another inspiring story in a day that abounded in them. Our small harmonious group sat on seven bikes, got acquainted with

how they work and the challenge could begin. After a short test ride on our new electric vehicles to the Monument to the Revolution of the people of Moslavina by sculptor Dušan Džamonja, our e-bike challenge began.

A history lesson

After the first difficult climb, we realize that what is waiting at the top is worth every drop of sweat. Garić grad is a fortress built during the 13th century along a large medieval road. Throughout history, numerous owners had claimed it: Hungarian-Croatian kings, Zagreb bishops, Slavonian counts... An important part of history was the period from 1412 to 1415 when it belonged to Barbara of Celje, known as the Black Queen. In the 16th century, the Ottomans set it on fire and razed it to the ground, after which it was left to decay and oblivion. In the 20th century it was renovated and today, viewed from the outside, it tells the story of its turbulent history.

After a short break with a history lesson, it's time to get back on the bikes. The trail is no longer so steep and we manage to overcome all the uphill we come across with the "turbo" option, our best friend on the tour. The landscape on the route changes from one minute to the next, the forest is green, the streams murmur... Ahead of us is the beautiful lookout point

Vis, then Humka, the highest peak of Moslavačka gora at an altitude of 488 meters, and kilometers and kilometers of trails through the forest.

And while at the beginning of the tour the biggest challenge was a steep uphill, later it seemed like a piece of cake compared to the uneven terrain which, soaked in rain, occasionally threatened with muddy puddles, sharp stones, wet leaves... We all successfully passed the most challenging parts of the route and rushed to Villa Garić down a steep road, the same one we had barely climbed at the beginning.

That moment when we all got off our bikes, took off our helmets is a moment of pride that I believe athletes, marathon runners and mountain climbers feel after conquering some hitherto unattainable goals. With goulash at Villa Garić, Matija opens the application and shows us on the map the route we have travelled, the total kilometers and altitude. "It seems to me that we had rolls and coffee here a few days ago, not this morning," says one of the participants. And that sentence sums up all our impressions. Lots of adventures and challenges in one day, an experience in Moslavačka gora that will be remembered.

- | 1. Moslavina
- | 2. Carić Grad Fortress



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A scenic landscape of a field at sunset. The foreground is filled with tall, green and yellow flowering plants. The middle ground shows rolling green hills under a vast, colorful sky with scattered clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The word "Medimurje" is written in a white, elegant script font across the center of the image.

Medimurje

IM THE NORTH

The green secret of the heart of Croatia

Why not choose green scenery instead of the blue sea, hills instead of waves? Why not replace the unbearably hot nights with a good night's sleep? These questions are being asked by an increasing number of people, according to statistics, which show that trends are slowly but surely changing. The sea is still "in", but the popularity of continental Croatia is undoubtedly growing.

The desire for new experiences or fresh nights may be the motive for a holiday on the continent, but, at least as far as Medimurje is concerned, we guarantee that excellent homemade food and beverages are reasons as well. As for the latter, it's not wine but don't worry we'll touch on it too, what we refer to is a natural juice made from - tangerines and apples. Everything locally grown, everything 100 percent clean and everything on the shelves of a unique

shop - "štacun", or, as they would say in Dalmatia, "butiga". Štacun is a small grocery shop.

Delicacies

"Štacun" is a small grocery shop with locally grown and made produce where about 20 farmers from Medimurje offer more than 150 different seasonal products during the year. This is the first organized short supply chain in Croatia. And, if for nothing else, it is worth dropping by Čakovec to visit the shop where only homemade and produced within 30 kilometers from it is sold.

And if you want something cooked, Medimurje will not disappoint you either. On the contrary, meso z tiblice (smoked pork kept in minced, seasoned bacon), turoš cheese, bograč stew, fish stew, cabbage with trganci (pasta tatters)

štrukli, purica s mlincima (roast turkey with pasta), carp on a forked branch or rabbit stew are just waiting to play with your taste buds. For dessert, it is either the traditional Medimurje gibanica or its deconstruction, or a simple vanilla ice cream brought to a high gourmet level with a few drops of pumpkin "black oil" and seeds. Wine worth sharing the table with the aforementioned delicacies is undoubtedly Medimurje Pushipel, which has been awarded a silver medal at the prestigious Decanter World Wine Awards. Warmly recommended.

A floating gem

All calories consumed, solid or liquid, should be burnt, and Medimurje provides an excellent opportunity for that. Namely, the development of cycling tourism is one of the strategic points of development of Medimurje County and therefore a



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lot has been invested in bicycle routes, signs, and other services for cyclists. Eko Mura bike trail, which starts and ends at the LifeClass Spa Sveti Martin, is recommended for beginners and those who want to explore the area. After the initial few kilometers, you will reach a mill and Mlinarska kuća. The floating mill in Žabnik is a jewel on the Mura river. Not much is left of the original, but the diligent and enterprising people of Međimurje picked up the remains and built a new mill. It was returned on the river in 2006 and soon became the most visited place within the Significant

Landscape of the Mura river. Next to it is the Mlinarska kuća with a great interactive museum exhibition "One day in the life of miller Franc Žalar", which, thanks to a modern technology, takes visitors back to the time when making bread was a hard work.

From mud and gold

What is it like to combine virtual glasses with the old methods of making bread? Well, we leave it to you to find out for yourself, and while you do, don't forget to take a look at the floating bread. The

bicycle trail follows the course of the river Mura, and takes you to Mursko Središće, where it stops at the memorial home of mining, and continues to the memorial park of the oil industry in Peklenica. Rich deposits of marl (coal) and crude oil, and even gold in the Drava sands have provided a saying that Međimurje nature was created from mud and gold. The trail then separates from the Mura river via Podturn and goes towards Vratišinec, and arrives to Selnica where you can visit the unique museum of old-timers, Šardi. The trail then returns to the spa.



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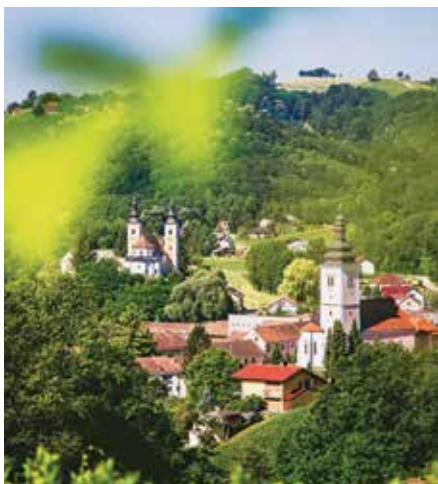


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You can rest your tired legs and feed your hungry mouth again in excellent restaurants that bear the label Gurman. It is an internal Medimurje classification that guarantees quality. Everyone will find something to their liking in the rich offer of restaurants, and some of them, in addition to great food and wines, offer views worth coming to Medimurje.

- | 1. St. Martin Thermal Spa/ Davorin Mance
- | 2. Čakovec/ Davorin Mance
- | 3. Žabnik/ Bojan Haron Markić
- | 4. Štrigova/Hrvoje Serdar
- | 5. Štrigova/ Hrvoje Serdar
- | 6. The Drava River/ Davorin Mance
- | 7. Medimurje/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 8. Medimurje gibanica/ Maja Danica Pečanić
- | 9. Medimurje/ Mario Hlača

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Cycling tourism



MEDIMURJE

A paradise for cyclists

We have cycling tourism – those words can be heard in almost every municipality, city or county with merely good roads and an interesting landscape through which they pass. And really, a cyclist who decides to explore the cultural and natural beauty of all those areas that "have cycling tourism" will not regret it. Actually, several cycling maps have already been printed and you only need to step on the bike pedals.

But are roads, beautiful nature and cycling maps enough? In most cases, yes, but if you ask the team from Međimurje – not so much!

Green hills and quality asphalt have long adorned Međimurje and as such attracted cyclists. However, what they started in Međimurje in 2007 puts them at the very top of the cycling offer in Croatia. Not only are the roads specially designed for

both cars and cyclists, but tourists on two wheels have a place to rest, wash, repair their bikes, and charge their mobile phones at the unique rest areas in Croatia. In addition, cyclists are welcome in every catering facility, whose owners are eager to host them and proudly point out that their guests have a place to "tie a horse". But let's see one thing at a time

Bike rest areas

The real development of cycling tourism in Međimurje County started in 2007. by applying good examples from Austria and Switzerland, where this form of tourism had grown by more than 25 percent per year. As part of that, near the building of the Tourist Board of Međimurje County, something interesting appeared - a bike rest area. Unique in Croatia and specialized only for cyclists!

There are three such rest areas in the county, and each includes access to drinking water, access to water for showering and washing bicycles, lockers for storing luggage, charging station for e-bikes and electronic appliances, bicycle parking racks, space and furniture for rest, cycling maps on the wall, stand with printed promotional materials, set of tools for minor bicycle repairs, set of most common inner tubes, first aid kit, tube pump...

Special services

The main motives for the arrival of cyclists are a beautiful nature landscape, a good bike infrastructure, the possibility of day trips to Slovenia, Hungary and Austria. However, the biggest bait is over 800 kilometers of maintained bike paths in Međimurje. And new ones being made all the time. Soon, the gravel, ie



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the gravel category of the trail will be introduced, and in addition to three large bike rest areas, such as the one near the Tourist Board, there are about twenty smaller ones in the county. That's enough for now.

So a cyclist has a place to rest and wash, but where can he eat? Medimurje has a solution for that as well. Namely, it is the first Croatian region to introduce a quality label for cycling tourism. "Cyclist Welcome" means providing high added value, or special services for cyclists in accommodation facilities, restaurants, travel agencies and other facilities used by this type of tourist. The service rate of "Cyclist Welcome" is from one to five gears.

Good practice

Currently 78 accommodation facilities, catering and other facilities bear the label. It guarantees cyclists a top service specially designed for their specific needs. This label and know-how have been adopted by Varaždin County and Zagreb County, as well as Zala County in Hungary.

The fact that roads are being built, not only for locals, but also for cyclists, testifies to how extensive and specific tourist offer of Medimurje is. Namely, considering the orientation of the destination towards cycling tourism, and on principles of good practice of destination management in cooperation with the County Road

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Administration of Međimurje County and local self-government units, construction of bicycle lanes and paths along roads has accelerated.

Međimurje currently has the best network of asphalt bike lanes and trails in relation to the length of roads in Croatia. The rest of bike infrastructure is also at a high level and Međimurje plans to become the first Radreise Region (ADFC- German Cyclist's Association label) in Croatia. Thanks to the good infrastructure, there has been a decline

in traffic accidents involving cyclists, although the number of cyclists in traffic has tripled in the past three years. Due to the positioning of the bike destination, Međimurje was included in the first two races of the Tour of Croatia, and due to the systematic approach and extensive offer, Međimurje was declared the top continental destination in Croatia last year.

| 1. Međimurje/ Davor Rostuhar | 2. Sv. Martin na Muri/ Hrvoje Serdar | 3. Međimurje/ Bojan Haron Markičević
| 4. Međimurje/ Tourist board of Međimurje | 5. Međimurje/ Tourist board of Međimurje
| 6. Međimurje/ Tourist board of Međimurje | 7. Međimurje/ Tourist board of Međimurje
| 8. Međimurje/ Tourist board of Međimurje



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Varaždín



CITY OF FESTIVALS

People come for the Špancirfest, but they always return...

It began life its in 1999, as the first street festival in Croatia. In the meantime, it has become an absolute hit in Varaždin, and this year it turned 21. It is now of legal age in the United States as well.

The Špancirfest is its name and it is among the best summer tourist attractions that the baroque city in the north can offer. Moreover, in the two decades of its existence, the Špancirfest has become synonymous with Varaždin, its culture and hospitality, thus becoming the most important tourist brand.

Varaždin existed as a destination before, but only after the heyday of the Špancirfest did the city flourish in terms of tourism. This is logical because the Špancirfest, an inseparable part of Varaždin's spirit and identity, presents the city at its best - full of music, joy and visitors in the warmth of the last week of August.

Although the biggest, the Špancirfest is not the only tourist trump card. The biggest attraction of the city is the historic core itself - beautiful, valuable, preserved and restored. In addition, there are numerous other festivals, events and happenings that take place throughout the year, all of which together create the image of Varaždin as one of the most important continental tourist destinations.

It is especially interesting that those who come to Varaždin for the first time to visit the Špancirfest, eventually return to the city. They simply discover the beauty of the streets, the special atmosphere, as well as the rich offer.

Logically, then they want to enjoy the city without the festival bustle, so they return to Varaždin for a more intimate gathering. Geographic location of the city

is great, it is well connected with Zagreb and the rest of Croatia, but also Europe, and the fact that it has a strong brand really opens the door for better tourist results. Seeing groups, families and individual visitors exploring Varaždin has long been a common sight, but in recent years the number of foreign visitors, especially those who come on their own, is really high.

The numbers prove how big the Špancirfest has actually become. Last year, more than 300,000 people visited the festival and the streets of Varaždin. And only during the ten festival days. Those who walk the picturesque streets of the baroque city for the first time during the festival may be surprised by its bustle and verve, but that's how it is on the continent. When it's celebration time, people really celebrate. And with warm and friendly hosts, the fun never ends.

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The citizens of Varaždin will proudly say that they are already used to the crowds, as they watch the rivers of people occupying the entire historic core. The Špancirfest has grown over the years, and with it the number of visitors who fill the squares, parks and shops.

Every edition of the Špancirfest, in a way, jumps out of the frame of the previous ones. That is precisely way the festival has survived and grown, because it was ready for a change, innovation, for testing new directions and had courage, when needed. Therefore, it is very ungrateful and, in

fact, impossible to say which edition of the Špancirfest was the best.

However, no matter how attractive the Špancirfest is, people do not forget the city of Varaždin. What should they see once they return in a quieter time, not during the festival? The historic core is certainly worth enjoying, but not as part of a human festival river, but on your own.

Varaždin has been systematically developing its cultural and tourist offer for years, attracting an increasing number

of visitors from Croatia and abroad. It is often referred to as the “city of festivals” which in a good way describes an important part of the offer.

In addition to the Špancirfest, the Varaždin Baroque Evenings festival is one of the most eminent of the kind in the world. Interesting festivals or some other events take place in Varaždin almost every month. Worth visiting are the “Laughter Week” theatre festival in March, the “Multimedia Festival - MOP Špancirfest” in May, the “International Festival of Animated Film for Children and Youth”

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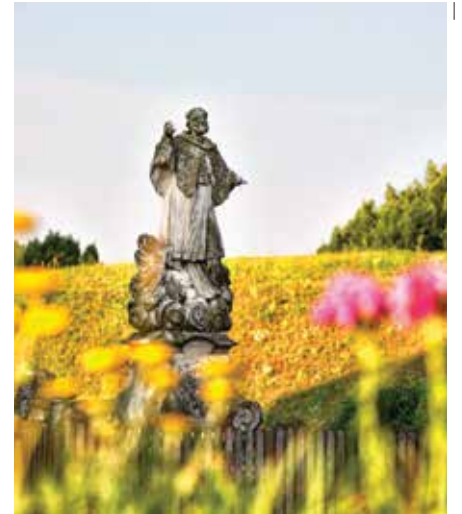


at the end of May, the “Summer in Varaždin” from June to mid-August, the “Festival of Varaždin Courtyards” and “The Drava Festival” in July, the “Trash Film Festival” in September, the “Clicker Festival in October”, the “Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Tourism” international fair, also in October.

In addition, Advent in Varaždin is an increasingly popular event that provides

an authentic holiday experience, and there are many more events throughout the year. The City Museum, the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin and the Kerekes Theatre with excellent programmes...

Therefore, if you come back, you certainly won't be bored.

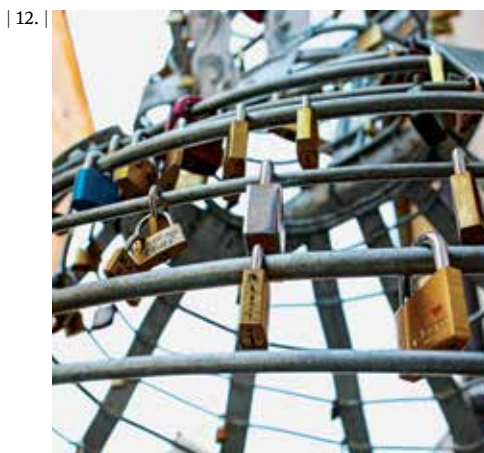


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- | 1. Varaždin/ Domagoj Blažević | 2. Varaždin/ Julien Duval | 3. Varaždin/ Darko Gorenak
- | 4. Varaždin/ Dražen Stojčić | 5. Varaždin/ Darko Vurušić | 6. Varaždin/ Ivo Biočina | 7. Varaždin/ Sergio Gobbo
- | 8. Varaždin/ Darko Vurušić | 9. Varaždin/ Domagoj Blažević | 10. Varaždin/ Ivo Biočina
- | 11. Varaždin/ Davorin Mance | 12. Varaždin/ Ivo Biočina | 13. Varaždin/ Domagoj Blažević



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Castles of Zagorje

MIDDLE AGES

Sail into the world of fairy tales

Veliki Tabor Castle, Desinić

When you approach Veliki Tabor Castle, for a moment you might feel you are in a fairy tale or at least a cartoon. The round towers and red roofs of one of the best-preserved medieval and renaissance fortified towns in continental Croatia, are everything you imagine a castle must be. And when you hear the legend hidden behind its walls, the fairy tale becomes even more real.

Frederick, the son of the eminent Count of Celje, fell madly in love with Veronica who was a commoner. His father opposed the young lovers and did everything to separate them, and eventually he had Veronica executed. A sad fairy tale.

Thematic tours of the castle can be arranged, with emphasis on history, architecture, legends...

Exhibitions are often held in the castle and it hosts the Tabor Film Festival as well.

Oršić Castle, Gornja Stubica

How did nobles live in the middle ages? How did peasants live? How did they spend their days and what ultimately prompted the peasants to rebel against their oppressed position?

A unique insight into this exciting part of Croatian history is hidden in Oršić Castle in Gornja Stubica, which also houses the Museum of Peasants' Revolts. Not far from it is the famous Gupčeva lipa (Gubec linden tree), the only surviving witness to the historic revolt.

The castle is well preserved, and the museum exhibits several collections: cultural, historical, artistic,

ethnographic, archaeological, Zagorje souvenir collection, collections of postcards and photographs, collections of weapons and equipment, Victoria Oršić collection and archaeological findings from the old town of Konjščina are stored here as well.

Every year, history is revived by a costumed battle at the castle, which is an ideal opportunity to visit!

Trakošćan, Bednja

Undoubtedly one of the most beautiful, and probably the most beautiful Croatian castle is located on a hill, surrounded by a fairytale forest and a lake. Excellently preserved, not only as an object but also as a witness to the time and life of its owners throughout history.



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The fortress from which the castle that we know today as Trakošćan was built dates back to the 13th century, and it was mentioned under that name as early as the 14th century. During the turbulent history, it was enlarged and the owners changed, but most of the history it was owned by Counts Drašković, who gave it today's recognizable appearance and stamp.

In the middle of the 19th century, count Juraj V. Drašković restored the town into a residential castle, and turned the environment into a romantic park. The next generations occasionally lived in Trakošćan until 1944, when the castle was nationalized.

Miljana Castle, Miljana

Even if you fail to arrange a tour of the interior of the castle, which is a private property, it is so picturesque that it is worth stopping by when visiting Zagorje and see it at least from the outside.

According to the website of the Tourist Board of Kumrovec - Desinić - Zagorska sela, the construction of the castle began at the end of the 16th century by the Ratkaj family. It is built of crushed stone and brick, and is conceived as a four-winged building with an inner courtyard enclosed by wings of unequal width and height.

In addition to the main building, the castle consists of outbuildings, gardens and a park. The interior also hides valuable artistic documents of the time in which the castle was built. Miljana is one of the best-kept and best-preserved castles in Croatia.

Oršić Castle, Bistra

It was built at the end of the 18th century in the Baroque style, and was commissioned by Krsto Oršić as a summer family residence. The current appearance of the castle was slightly

changed in style and originality in 1947, when it was adapted with UNICEF funds for a children's convalescent home or resort. Today, the castle houses a Special Hospital for Chronic Diseases of Children. In the castle complex there is a chapel of St. Joseph, also built in the Baroque style, with a particularly pronounced choir and organ made by the famous organ builder from Celje, Franjo Šulc. In the oval hall are valuable inlaid doors and painted walls and ceiling. It is closed for sightseeing, except from the outside, because it houses a hospital.

| 1. Trakošćan Castle/ Darko Vurušić | 2. Veliki Tabor Castle/ Zoran Jelača | 3. Trakošćan/ Sergio Gobbo
| 4. Oršić Castle / Ivo Biočina | 5. Oršić Castle / Ivo Biočina | 6. Miljana Castle/ Ivo Biočina
| 7. Miljana Castle/ Ivo Biočina



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Health tourism

THERMAL SPAS

Do something for yourself

A few months ago, I was on business in Bath, a charming town situated in Somerset in the south-west of England. The kind hosts took us on a tour of the town about which the prominent British writer Jane Austen often wrote in her novels.

I quickly learned that the greatest pride of Bath is the Roman bath that the town was named after. Namely, the Romans built baths and a Roman temple on the surrounding Bath hills in the Avon river valley, around the only natural hot springs in Great Britain.

Their Roman baths, of Latin name *Aquae Sulis*, are equivalent to our *Aquae Iasae*, an archeological site in Varaždin Spa.

We have as many as 222 sources of health

While Trevor Jones, a lover of architecture and a tourist guide to Bath, listed the benefits of the spa, describing its miraculous water, unaware that in Croatia we have as many as 222 destinations with natural benefits such as healing mud, clean sea of high salinity, healing thermal water, special types of medicinal oil - naphthalene, which in Europe is only found here, I was already forging plans in my head, combining the upcoming days off and the weekends thinking about where to go for a quick regeneration. A wellness? A massage? A Spa?

I hesitated between a trip to the coast or to the continental part of Croatia. For a long time, I have wanted to visit the largest spa area in the region, that of the 2,500-square-meter at the Bellevue Hotel in Mali Lošinj, which won the 2018 Best Destination Spa award for excellence for the Condé Nast Johansens.

A relaxing weekend

But Bizovac Thermal Spa is much closer, and its Aquapolis has 11 pools, numerous water attractions and a Finnish sauna, or, perhaps LifeClass Spa "Sveti Martin" with the most modern wellness oasis in

continental Croatia spreading at 1800 square meters, where thermal water has been used for healing for 100 years. If instead of a relaxing weekend I turn it into a fun weekend with my nephews, I can forget clay masks and saunas - I need swimming pools. Maybe those at Jezerčica Thermal Spa, Tuhelj, Selce...

The doors of our thermal spas are open all year round. Investments are made in facilities and employees and as a result they achieve good results and an income increase of up to 20 percent. Summer is the high season for them, and their product is very competitive compared to the surrounding countries, which are developing wellness and spa combined with the congress tourism.

Increasing number of guests

Bizovac thermal spa and health resort, near Osijek, has the warmest water of all Croatian spas. The first spring is at a depth of over 1800 meters where the water is 96 degrees Celsius, the second is slightly colder - "only" 85 degrees. The guests have recognized the healing benefits of water rich in minerals and thus, they return regularly.

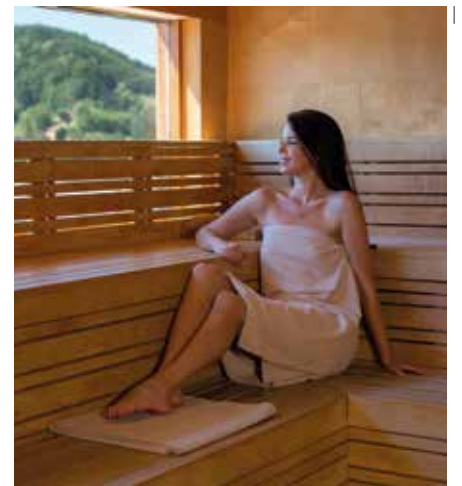
Increasing occupancy rates from year to year show that Tuhelj Thermal Spa is also preferred by foreign tourists.

The popularity of Jezerčica Thermal Spa is also growing, and "Sveti Martin"

spa has turned to green procurement, and a lot of groceries are supplied by local producers from Međimurje, which is highly appreciated by guests, both domestic and foreign.

Water from the depths defines all our spas. In Varaždin Spa it is enriched with sulfur. The smell of rotten eggs may be repulsive, but water (warm) is rich in healing effects. In Lipik and its spas water (also warm), on the other hand, has no smell, but the taste is specific. It's like drinking a mineral water whose bubbles have flattened. But here too its healing effects have been proven. Enough to head to health resorts and spas of continental Croatia.

- | 1. Tuhelj Thermal Spa/ Hrvoje Serdar
- | 2. Tuhelj Thermal Spa/ Hrvoje Serdar
- | 3. St. Martin Thermal Spa/ Hrvoje Serdar



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Medvednica



THE LUNGS OF ZAGREB

A mountain that is one with the city

If it wasn't for Medvednica, Zagreb would not be what it is, it would significantly lose its appeal. Medvednica is a rare example of a nature park entering a capital city. The hill is that close to the city that there is even a spring race, Boroša, that starts on Jelačić square and leads to the top, to Sljeme. The almost fourteen kilometers, mostly uphill, very steep at the very end, can be run in less than an hour by the fastest ones, and for those who are less fit it takes about an hour and forty minutes to make it to the top.

Crowds at the weekends

Sljeme, the top, is at an altitude of 1033 meters. A lot of people from Zagreb, or at least those who don't know of or don't visit Medvednica very often, refer to Sljeme as the whole hill not just the top. For them Sljeme and Medvednica

are just synonyms for the same thing. On the other hand, thanks to the fact it is almost one with Zagreb, Medvednica is the most visited mountain in Croatia.

The forests of Medvednica have always been of exceptional importance for the life of its people. There is an old saying: In the springtime I offer you rest, in summer shade, in autumn I feed you and in winter I keep you warm. Up until recently, this was all merit of the trees of Medvednica. This is where people who lived at the foot of the mountain collected wood for heating, knowing exactly what wood burns the best, and which is best to make charcoal of; in the springtime people would collect young sprouts of herbaceous plants full of vitamins much needed during long winters, in the summer wild strawberries, blackberries, red berries and blueberries, and

in autumn mushrooms and many chestnuts, rose hip, nuts and cornelian cherries, etc.

However, people have always entered the kingdom of the forest with caution and respect for it was believed to be a home to magical beings, well-intentioned to those who respect their world, and merciless to those who don't know it or disrespect it in any way.

People's imagination has often found in the bushes, leaves and flowers a little forest man called Mucko or Žirek who drinks juice squeezed from the flowers of the goldmoss stonecrop in order to become invisible and blend in with the unique appearance of the forest. He never liked being followed and would always lead reckless forest visitors the wrong way so they would get lost. Considered especially magical are the

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oak forests filled with all kinds of bell-shaped flowers which attract fairies.

A mountain with no bears

The mountain stretches from Podsused, the southwest of Zagreb towards northeast, to a small town called Sveti Matej-Laz; the backbone of Medvednica is 42 kilometers long. It was formed after a ground uplift and therefore its slopes are rather steep (especially those facing Zagorje) and at its foot there are thermal springs such as those in Stubičke spa, springs in Sutinsko, one near Dubravica in Gornji Stenjevec and in the Ribnjak Park in Zagreb. In the past, Medvednica was twice under the sea, an island in the Pannonian Sea, hence its caves. Along with Vetrenica, the most famous cave, there is also the Velika Peć in the east part of the mountain.

There are eight special reservoirs of forest vegetation in the Nature Park. There are also three trees protected by law – two old jew trees, one found at Horvatove stube (Horvat stairs), another on Šupljak and Gubec Linden Tree (Gupčeva lipa) in Gornja Stubica.

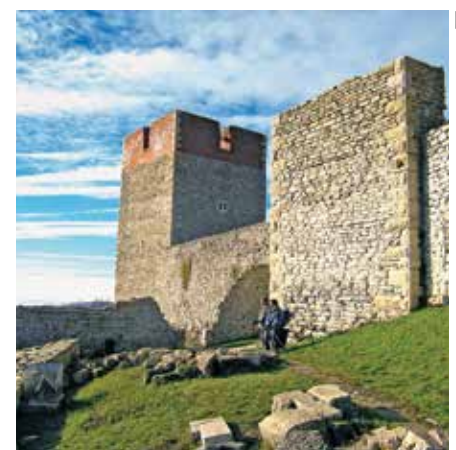
The majority of the diverse plants are in the area of beech forests. More than 80% of the Nature Park is covered in twelve different forest communities with over 1200 plant species. The forest of Medvednica used to have wolves, lynxes and bears roaming around, but it is now home to wild boars, foxes, martens, rabbits, etc.

Two years ago a wild cat was spotted, it is assumed that there aren't many of them though. The last bear, according to data available, was killed in the Middle

Ages, and Medvednica (the name has the word bear in its root) is now a mountain with no bears. There are 24 bat species living in the Park. In spring, summer and early autumn they can be seen in Vetrenica, a cave where bear's bones were found. Vetrenica's branching canals are over seven kilometers long and are among the longest in Croatia.

The mountain also has over 70 bird species nesting there. The Neanderthal man found its hiding in the Vetrenica cave. Other attractions include two medieval fortresses, high on its peaks. At the very edges there are two towns – Susedgrad in the west, Zelingrad in the east, and in the middle of the mountain, at the top Mali Plazur, the old Medvedgrad which can easily be seen when looking at Medvednica from Zagreb. Just take a look...

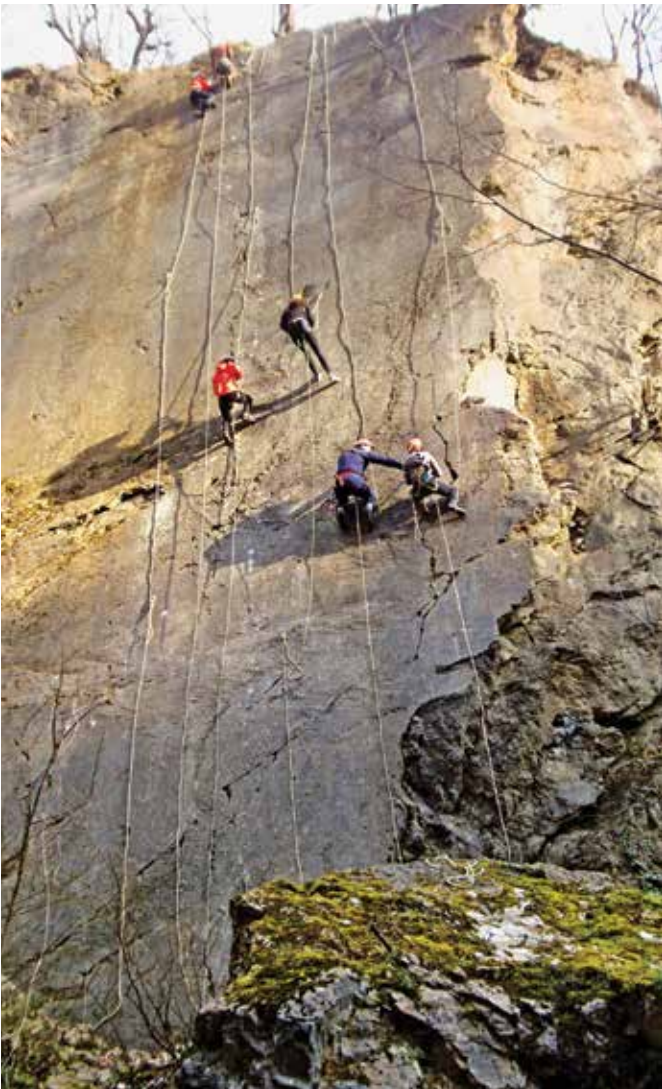
| 1. Medvedgrad Fortress/ Zoran Jelača | 2. Medvednica Cave/ Alan Čaplar | 3. Sljeme/ Alan Čaplar | 4. Šestine/ Alan Čaplar | 5. Medvedgrad / Alan Čaplar | 6. The Chapel of St. Jakob/ Alan Čaplar | 7. Medvedgrad/ Alan Čaplar | 8. Medvednica/ Joško Fabris | 9. Gorsko Zrcalo cliff/ Alan Čaplar | 10. Činovnička livada and the TV tower/ Alan Čaplar



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Zagreb

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Find a museum to your liking

Zagreb is the city with the largest number of museums per capita, according to the Zagreb Tourist Board. From traditional ones like the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Arts and Crafts to the unusual ones that have been opening up over the last few years. The latter seem to be increasingly interesting, judging by the number of visitors. Tourists visiting Zagreb will ask you if you have been to the Museum of Broken Relationships or the Museum of Illusions, and those keen on trends will also inquire about the Museum of Hangovers, the first of the kind in the world. So, there are many to choose from and the choice is up to you...

Museum of the Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče

The Museum of the Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče is the first museum of medicine

in Croatia, opened in 2014 on the 135th anniversary of the hospital. Besides the rich history of the Vrapče Psychiatric Clinic, it also thoroughly presents the development of psychiatry in Croatia. Thus, one can find here the first case history from 1879 when "mania" was diagnosed by doctors at the then Royal Terrestrial Institution for Mental Diseases in Stenjevac, early massive EEG devices, electro-shockers (electroconvulsive therapy devices), strait-jackets and the nurses' uniforms. The museum was designed by the late director of the hospital, Professor Vlado Jukic, who planned the exhibition and collected interesting exhibits for years. It is housed in a small building that used to be a grocery store and is designed to take visitors through all the "stages" of treating a patient - from entering the waiting room, doctor sessions, going through a work therapy, and eventually leaving the hospital.

Museum of Hangovers

As Croatia is, according to statistics, among the world's top countries in terms of alcohol consumption, it could be expected that the first ever Museum of Hangovers would be opened here. As a nation that likes to have a drop too much, we have quite enough stories, both entertaining and instructive, that could be turned into museum exhibits. The owners of the first Hangover Museum were led by a similar idea when they decided to open a space in December last year to collect drunken experiences and demonstrate interactively, using "drunken glasses", what's it like to steer a wheel with more than two percent of alcohol in your blood. Their idea was not to promote alcoholism, Mr. Mikelić told us, but to create a place where people could have fun, laugh and learn something about alcohol. In less than two months, more than 1,400 people

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visited the museum, and many foreign media such as Lonely Planet, CNN, the New York Post, the Daily Mail and many others have covered it. The museum is conceived as a "drunken homecoming from the bar" - the first section is a "street" decorated with murals and graffiti, next come "mirrors" that represent shop windows, a "garden" and finally a "room" where one goes to sleep drunk and wakes up hungover. At the entrance of the museum each visitor is given three darts and the possibility of "drunken" shooting into the center of the darts board for free entry. Those who fail to do so get a shot of Lika brandy for comfort.

Museum of illusions

When the Museum of Illusions opened its doors in Zagreb in 2016, few could imagine it would become a successful franchise that has expanded to Zadar, Vienna, Ljubljana, New York, Dubai, Oman and many other cities. Although its "tentacles" are found around the world, the originator of the worldwide trend of the Museum of Illusions is located in the Croatian capital city, comfortably located at Ilica 72. The permanent exhibition of the museum has more than 70 exhibits, from the Illusion

of a chair, Head on the platter, Infinity room and Ames room (there is a giant in one corner and a dwarf in the other). The exhibits are highly interactive and amusing, and the exhibition often changes depending on the occasion or the time of year (eg the exhibits have been adapted to celebrate Halloween and the whole museum "transforms" into the Museum of Reality to mark the UNICEF's birthday). The Museum of Illusions is one of the most visited museums in Zagreb, and its desire is to intrigue your confidence in the senses, to delight you, to confuse you a little, but at the same time to educate you. Visiting this museum is an adventure for all senses.

Mini Train Museum – Backo Mini Express

Did you know that the largest railway model in Southeast Europe can be seen in Zagreb in the Mini Train Museum – Backo Mini Express, located at number 4 Gundulićeva Street since 2015. The museum covers the surface of about 300 square meters, where 150 trains simultaneously operate on 1500 meters of rails. The creator of the fifth largest railway model in Europe is Antun Urbić called Backo, who with his associates

spent five years diligently turning the boy's dream into a reality. The model is almost 85 percent Croatian product, extending over several levels, three meters tall at the highest and ten centimeters below the surface at the lowest part (some trains run below the floor level and pass under the visitor's feet). For a complete experience, various meteorological phenomena are simulated, such as the sound of rain and thunder. It is especially interesting to see the authentic view of Zagreb, like the main railway station and people rushing to work or skiing track on Sljeme with miniature skiers and maintenance workers.

Museum of Zagreb in the 1980s

Remember the time when everyone drove Fićo cars and rode Tomos motorbikes, played Space Invaders on Commodore 64, hid erotic magazines under the bed and was fully prepared in case of a nuclear war? This was, of course, during the 80s of the last century when the ultimate Croatian music hits were "Đuli" and "Rock me", when people read Start and Danas magazines and "Štefica Cvek in the Jaws of Life" novel, world top charts were dominated by bands like Queen, a-ha, Duran Duran, and fashion trends were big hairstyles, sequins and neon outfits. You can step into Zagreb in the 80s if you head to Radićeva Street 34, where, for the last three years, there is a time machine which takes you back to the not so distant past. The Museum of Zagreb in the 1980s consists of six rooms that reconstruct what a living room, a kitchen, a bedroom and an office looked like at the time. Many exhibits have been donated to the museum, and behind each one there is a unique story. Everyone is invited to play a video game on a black-and-white TV, try on a crazy fashion outfit, peek into wooden dressers, and take a photo in the

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legendary Zastava 750 car as a keepsake of their visit.

Museum of Broken Relationships

The originator of the "unusual museums in Zagreb" is the Museum of Broken Relationships, which delighted Croats in 2006 and the rest of the world was soon to follow (in 2016 a permanent exhibition was opened in Los Angeles). The museum first attracted media attention as a traveling exhibition which then became a permanent exhibition in Zagreb and Los Angeles. The museum even won the prestigious Kenneth Hudson Award for Europe's Most Innovative Museum in 2011. It is designed as a concept of recovery from love breakups, so that heartbroken romantics donate to the museum their own objects, memories and relationship reminders, hoping this would make their emotional breakdowns less painful.

Museum of Torture

"You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind." This quote by Mahatma Gandhi at the entrance of the Zagreb Museum of Torture is a kind of "warning" to visitors to prepare for what is to come, but also not to forget that torture, although mostly physical, can often be mental means of punishment. The first such museum in Croatia has about 70 instruments and devices for torture, and with its dark atmosphere and musical theme worthy of a horror movie,

the museum attacks all your senses not allowing you to relax even for a moment. The most striking devices are certainly the Iron Maiden or the Nuremberg Virgin - the cruelest method of torturing convicts in the Middle Ages, the pendulum, i.e. a swinging ex which gets lower with each swing, the guillotine, the boot, the crown of Matija Gubec, the mask of shame, the rack...

Museum of Chocolate

Chocolate lovers finally got their cup of tea when the Museum of Chocolate opened in Zagreb in November. Even the ticket for the museum is edible (it's a chocolate tasting kit with nine different types of chocolate to be tasted through the Museum). The sweet tour begins in the rainforests of Central America with cocoa beans tasting and learning about the history of cocoa. It then moves on to the 16th century when the conquistadors conquered Native American tribes and brought cocoa to Europe. At that time, chocolate was only used in the court and was reserved only for the rich. It still wasn't sweet and it was consumed as a liquor. It wasn't until the 19th century that the consumption of chocolate similar to what we have today began. The Museum of Chocolate is a unique experience where all the exhibits must be touched, smelled, tasted and, finally, enjoyed. The rooms are designed to the detail and look like Hollywood movie sets worthy of being photographed in for social media.



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1. Zagreb/ Zoran Jelača | 2. The Museum of the Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče/ Davor Pongračić, Hanza media
3. The Museum of the Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče/ Davor Pongračić, Hanza media
4. The Museum of Hangovers/ Marko Todorov, Hanza media
5. The Museum of Illusions/ Boris Kovačev, Hanza media
6. The Mini Train Museum – Backo Mini Express/ Tomislav Krišto, Hanza media
7. The Museum of Zagreb in the 1980s/ Sandra Šimunović, Hanza media
8. The Museum of Zagreb in the 1980s/ Sandra Šimunović, Hanza media
9. The Museum of Torture/ Darko Tomaš, Hanza media
10. Muzej Museum of Torture/ Darko Tomaš, Hanza media

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Karlovac



THE FOUR BEAUTIES

The Dobra, The Kupa, The Korana and The Mrežnica. But that's not all...

Come on, jump!

I looked down. To tell the truth, I'm not that old, but the flower of my youth is not so young anymore that its petals wouldn't fall apart when it hits the water.

The sun is high. The temperature is rising and the glare from the surface is blinding.

Cener, cener...

"May that friars' beer save me from misfortune, if my own crazy head won't," I thought, and the very next moment I was flying (falling) through the air. It all took a little less than a second, but in my head it seemed like at least a few. In the blink of an eye, it was all over. I emerged on the surface and thought that the highest dive this

Dalmatian guy had ever jumped couldn't have been the one into the sea but -into the river.w

You can't come to Karlovac in summer and not jump off the cener - they told me. "Cener", "cener"... What is "cener" - I wondered. In the end, it appeared in front of me - a diving platform at Fogin bathing area, the most popular gathering place for the inhabitants of Karlovac and their guests. They have always bathed on the green beauty of the Korana river, and generations have experienced their first paddles, jumps, dives, and even kisses in the area of today's Fogin bathing area.

Although, the continent is in question, so to speak, the "state of mind" is equal to that on the coast. We visited Karlovac at the end of June, and the beach was full until sunset. We believe that this

was also the case with other beauties of Karlovac - the Dobra, the Kupa and the Mrežnica rivers.

Just like everybody on the coast has a favorite beach, everyone in Karlovac has their favorite river to enjoy, either in summer or winter. In my case the Korana proved to be an excellent host. The emerald green water was benevolent to the mad head that dived into it from a height of ten meters. As for the temperature, it was - just right. Bathers are careful that the Korana is not too fast, but not too slow either.

Franciscan craft beer

Summer in Karlovac, therefore, besides being green, is refreshing as well. And, in addition to the rivers, which refresh the bodies, the palate will be "refreshed" by the above-mentioned beer. Craft pale



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Karlovac is not near the highway; it's the highway that is near Karlovac. And it is an absolute pity not to get off it and make a tour of everything that is worth a visit - Zvijezda (the historic core of the town), Aquatika (the freshwater museum) and Turanj (the Homeland War Museum), parks, sacred heritage, the town museum and the old town of Dubovac... Oh yes, and beer!

ale beer. It is made by the friars from the Franciscan monastery situated next to the Church of the Holy Trinity. You will easily find them, precisely because of the mentioned church which is in the center of the old Karlovac Zvijezda as one of the main signposts. It is an unavoidable part of the sightseeing tour of the town, which quite unfairly serves as a GPS tag and is most often mentioned in the context of a motorway. For, "when you have reached Karlovac, you are almost in Zagreb" or "you have barely left the metropolis" when you pass the exit for the town on four rivers. But here is the news. Karlovac is not near the highway; it's the highway that is near Karlovac. And it is an absolute pity not to get off it and make a tour of everything that is worth a visit - Zvijezda (the historic core of the town), Aquatika (the freshwater museum) and Turanj (the Homeland War Museum), parks, sacred heritage, the town museum and the old town of Dubovac...

Oh yes, and beer. If you are lucky and arrive when the Franciscans, led by the guardian and priest Krunoslav Albert, have already poured beer into bottles and left it to cool, then do not hesitate for a second. Book a tour of the monastery immediately (there is a lot to be seen, trust me) and ask them to offer you beer rolls and pretzels as refreshments.

The Franciscans produce about 600 bottles of beer four times a year, and in addition, there are also souvenirs, such as beer mugs, salt shakers... All for a symbolic donation... Somehow it is logical that the Franciscans decided to make beer. After all, that is what Karlovac is also known for. At the end of August and the beginning of September, a visit to the Beer Days is a must. As they say in Dalmatia, then all the šušur (high-spirited atmosphere) is in Karlovac. Good performers, festival beer, gastronomy and great vibes guarantee an unforgettable experience of the Zvijezda (Starry) Summer (zvijezda is star in English) - a series of events that make

Karlovac lively every summer. However, other seasons should not be neglected either. Thus, Karlovac tries to make an even better and more attractive Advent every year, and winter it is also the season of good food. In the gastronomy, therefore, the main stars are the fruits of the forest - mushrooms, chestnuts, as well as game (wild boar, bear, deer). Of course, freshwater fish is indispensable on the plate, and our recommendation is perch in a crust made of corn flour with seeds, as well as the queen of rivers and rapids - trout.

To Jaškovo - the village of strudel

Medimurje has Medimurje gibanica, and Karlovac has – strudel. This dessert is a symbol of the area, and only 16 kilometers away is Jaškovo - the village of strudel and the proud holder of the Guinness World Record for the largest apple and grape strudel. Calories should be burnt and a walk through Zvijezda is perfect for that. It is best accompanied by an expert guide. Because, you will find yourself in front of a building, and you will have no idea about history that took place in it. You also won't wonder what "schaufenster" actually means. During the tour, be sure to take a selfie

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with a sculpture of a frog. Why it is right there and which tourists consider it irresistible are the questions to which Morana from the nearby Katzler pavilion has the answers. The Katzler may be small, but it houses an entire city. How? It is best to see for yourself.

Everything we have mentioned so far is ideal for Instagram. And, although it may no longer be in fashion, what is a good trip without a great panoramic photo.

And, to take it, you should climb the prehistoric mound above the Kupa, where there has long been a place of defense. And on which the old town of Dubovac was built in the 13th century. The view from the Branič kula (defence tower) to which the creaking stairs lead clearly explains why this location is strategically important, and in the inner courtyard there is a restaurant whose specialties are worth tasting and which takes every visitor back to the glorious past. After lunch, the best thing to do is to go back to the river. The waterfall on the Korana is calming, and coffee on the terrace of the hotel "Srakovčić" will be just what you need. You need to rest for new experiences that Karlovac has yet to offer... You just have to dare and jump.

Turanj

If you drive along the old road from the direction of Lika to Karlovac, four kilometers before the town, on the historic plateau next to the Korana, Turanj is its name, proudly stands a bullet-scarred brick building, armored with steel and glass. It is the Museum of the Homeland War Karlovac - Turanj, which tells the story of resistance,

courage and sacrifice of Croatian defenders, all in the service of promoting peace. No one who sets foot there remains immune to the horrors of war documented in a superbly equipped and modern museum.



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- | 1. Karlovac/ Tourist board of Karlovac
- | 2. Karlovac/ Ivo Biočina
- | 3. Karlovac/ Tourist board of Karlovac
- | 4. The Mrežnica River/ Stipe Surać
- | 5. Dubovac Castle/ Zvonimir Tanocki
- | 6. Karlovac County/ Vedran Metelko
- | 7. Karlovac/ Aleksandar Gospić



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Aquatika

AQUARIUM

A museum telling the story about water

There it is...

But where? – we asked as we strained our eyes to spot it. After all, an aquarium shouldn't be too hard to see somewhere in nature.

Well, that's the secret. The newset and by far one of the most appealing tourist attractions in town of Karlovac, not easily spotted even from the legendary cener, a popular name for a 10-metre tall diving platform domineering the Fogin bathing area on the left side of the Korana, the fresh water aquarium Aquatika, literally blends with its environment. Namely, the aquarium is entombed.

Built in so that the only thing you can see is a lawn, but as the visitors approach, they find out the lawn is actually divided into three arms with a tiny square in the middle.

It is the central part of the complex, with three entrances and a magnificent view of the Korana waterfall and the above mentioned bathing area (it was already 7.30 p.m. and there were still people arriving for their daily dose of refreshing water flowing from the Plitvice lakes).

The aquarium building, the café and the library and the management building are facing the square which is the main meeting point and scenery for numerous events. Namely, more and more Karlovac citizens want to be a part of the Aquatika story.

Children's paradise

On the other side of the buildings there is a grassy slope accompanied by a children playground. Whichever you take it, it's a paradise for kids and thus for adults, too. It's simple – Aquatika is

hidden to preserve the vision of Karlovac, the Korana shore and the bathing area. And they haven't regretted it. It has won numerous prizes for design and architecture.

Dare we say, the architects have done an extremely good job at Karlovac. It's not only the first fresh water aquarium in Croatia, but a state that would be appreciated in Sweden, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain...

Just pick a country. Even if it wasn't finished, it would be worth visiting... Before diving into local rivers, we had a snack at the square where we enjoyed a glass of cold lemonade. And the straw in the glass – not just any straw, but a paper one.

Namely, Aquatika is the story of water. Clean water. The museum café has

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stopped using most of plastic containers and they are promoting specially branded Aquatika glass jug.

The smell and the sound

When you first enter Aquatika, what surprises you most is its smell. If you close your eyes, you'll get a feeling of literally being near a river. This feeling is accompanied by a gurgling sound of water fulfilling the whole, exceptionally designed area.

And yes, the inner temperature provides the desperately needed refreshment from the boiling 33 degrees Celsius in scorching Karlovac that afternoon. And the sound... Yes, the sound.

The author of these lines felt like finding a deckchair and "having a siesta" at the spot as any true Dalmatian. But, then I would have to miss all the beauties offered by the local rivers.

The idea of aquarium itself is based on the idea of dividing the river flow on

The most recent and by far one of the most appealing tourist attractions in Karlovac, the fresh water aquarium Aquatika, literally blends with the environment. It cannot be easily spotted even from the legendary center, a popular name for a 10-metre tall diving platform domineering the Fogin bathing area on the left side of the Korana river. Reason for that is simple - the aquarium itself is dug into the ground.

upper, middle and lower. In the caving system, we can see the endemic kinds of fish mostly found in karst areas and underground habitats. The biggest tank holds migrating kinds of fish originating from the dinosaur era. Most of these are extinct in Croatia.

One of them is a lovely fish with a flattened mouth. It is dark, but with

white bony shells. It's a starry sturgeon. They used to patrol the local rivers. At least before Đerdap hydroelectric power plant was built.

In the big fish tank there is a beluga, a smaller kind, however, not the giant one to which it can grow.

Aquatika exhibits still waters, primarily bogs and swamps, followed by foreign fish species, most of them being invasive and endangering local species. The last tank, however, reveals the karst phenomenon of tufa waterfall creation and points out the importance of its preservation.

Guided by numerous documentaries seen on Discovery channel, the first question we asked at our arrival in Aquatika was: Where is the catfish and how big is it?

UNESCO museum network

There it is. Not so big, though, but it will be. We answer to ourselves as we spot the nearby tank and the familiar moustache river mouth.

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It should be pointed out you can find Aquatika online, both on social networks and operatively. Namely, every tank is equipped with sensors which send data on the internet, and the system can also be managed online.

Further on, if you are on museum Wi-Fi via mobile phone, while you're touring Croatian rivers, you can hear all there is to know about them. From flora and fauna to its rocks.

It is one of the most extraordinary interpretation centres in Croatia accepted to the UNESCO network of water museum as well which is corroborated by the number of over 200,000 visitors every year. Croatia has such abundant life in fresh waters...why not take the best of it? After all, home guests are thrilled with it, but foreigners even more. Besides fish, they enjoy the architecture, too. They stay longer and find it unusual to see such a modern building in Croatia.

This is one of the 70 museums dealing with the water topics and we dare to say the most appealing one. Hard to believe? Take two hours on your way to Zagreb, exit the motorway, detour to Karlovac and find out yourselves. The museum is closed for three days a year – on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Easter. And it's definitely worth seeing...

- | 1. Aquatika/ Denis Stošić
- | 2. Aquatika/ Jure Živković
- | 3.-11. Aquatika/ Denis Stošić



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A vertical photograph of a hiker standing on a mossy rock ledge next to a waterfall. The hiker is wearing a red jacket and a backpack. The waterfall is cascading down a rocky cliff face. The surrounding area is a dense forest with green trees. The text "Gorski kotar" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Gorski kotar

NATURE INTACT

Rivers, woods and caves, as the most beautiful fairy-tale

Gorski kotar is frequently referred to as a “fairy-tale place”. This is due to its amazing caves, hills, lakes, forests and springs which instantly take visitors to a fairy-tale by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić (a famous Croatian children fairy-tale writer). It is not far away from the truth, though. Almost every natural beauty in this region is linked to a folk tale which our ancestors invented to explain its mystical creation. Jagodina stijena was named after a young girl called Jagoda who jumped off a cliff because of her sad love story and by falling down, she stopped the flowing of the Jezerka river.

Legends and tales

The cave called Mužekova hižica was told to be inhabited by “small husbands” (mužek= a cute name for a husband, a hubbie in Croatian) who left the cave only to inform the local people it was time

for sowing. However, there are creepier stories than these.

At Lokve they used to believe there was Vodenjak (a scary fantasy creature) who frightened young children, in order to keep them away from Lokvarska lakes. Golubinjak forest park was allegedly inhabited by a 14-metre tall giant called Polnoćnjak, who used to take away kids in the evening hours unless they had gone home in time. There were legends referring to life after death as well. People used to believe that in the Lokvarka and other tiny rivers there were small creatures called “little lights” who sailed the river whenever somebody died, but would disappear after the mass for the deceased had been held. The characters from these folk tales were all imaginary, but the sites where the tales took place are real. And as extraordinary as in the legends, as we discovered ourselves.

Our story starts at 1035 metres above sea level at Petehovac mountaineering centre. The centre was built in 1939 by the people from Delnice who carried the building material on their backs. Nowadays, Petehovac is a popular mountaineering and sledging destination, including a restaurant famous for its stew and home-made gnocchi.

For vacation only

The drive to our next destination reveals the contents of Gorski kotar. There are cycling tracks and hiking routes called “Delnice Bike and Hike” where all the travellers may follow their journey via GPS. The main attractions are park forest Japlenški vrh and delicious “wild burgers” made from boars, a safari involving big beasts which is organized by Risnjak national park, followed by fishing and rafting on the Kupa river.



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The next destination is Zeleni vir, but Jelena (our guide) is taking us on a bit longer route, alongside the Curak river where we first realized why Gorski kotar is such a fairy-tale place for holidays. Namely, it reminded us of Rivendell, an ancient forest from The Lord of the Rings, inhabited by elves. Ahead of us there is a path covered with brown leaves and it is the only part that was obviously shaped by a human hand or shall we say, a foot. The rest is pure nature, involving all the senses. Sounds, first of all, birds tweeting, a creek gurgling and pebbles stirring under our feet. Then the smell of wild garlic and wild hazel, which can be seen alongside all the way, and in the end, a view dominated completely by green colour. The trees, around the path, on the river, anywhere. Only the sky fights the domination of this green paradise. Zeleni vir is a home to a great number of sites and attractions, including a small restaurant whose specialty is raspberry štrukle (a typical continental Croatian dish made of savoury dough). The picnic area is the junction of many paths, each of them offering a nature jewel at its end.

Power and wildness

It's time to go back to the picnic area and take the right turn towards Vražji prolaz, a place which has been popularly referred to as a "picnic area for the bravest hikers" ever since 19th century. Right at the entrance you can hear the gurgling sounds of Jasle

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creek which has been wearing down stones for thousands of years to form a passage which astonishes us with the power of its water flow and the wildness of its cliffs. It was arched by little bridges and steps built into the rocks by metal beams, gradually leading more towards inland. The further you go, the more you get the feeling of nature ruling here like a sovereign monarch.

The path is leading us to Gorski raj, the only part of this artificial lake formed when the Lokvarka river was stopped by youth public works from 1952 to 1955. The lake flooded what used to be a green valley with a village and three sawmills and a few kilometres of Lujzijana road, and when the lake is nowadays dried for maintenance, you can still see the remnants of the flooded village. This is a swimming and rafting area, with a hiking path around the lake which is 11 kilometres long. The day is slowly coming to its end, but new destinations await – tomorrow we're visiting Golubinjak, Lokvarka cave and Vrelo, Kotač –the Nature House on Lujzijana road...all of the reasons to dive once again in the fairy-tale called Gorski kotar.

- | 1. Zeleni Vir/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 2. Delnice/ Ivo Biočina
- | 3. The Kamačnik Canyon/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 4. Gorski kotar/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 5. Kamačnik/ Bojan Haron Markičević
- | 6. Risnjak/ Ivo Biočina
- | 7. Risnjak/ Ivo Biočina
- | 8. Risnjak/ Ivo Biočina
- | 9. Risnjak/ Luka Tambača
- | 10. Lokvarsko Lake/ Romeo Ibrišević



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A panoramic view of a mountain range under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The foreground features a rocky slope with a small wooden cabin and a red roof. The middle ground shows a dense forest of green trees, and the background consists of rolling hills and mountains. The text "Via Adriatica" is written in a white, cursive font across the center of the image.

Via Adriatica

HIKING TRAILS

Over mountains and across rivers

It's been a few months since the first Croat hiked the entire Via Adriatica, the first long-distance tourist- hiking trail which extends from Kamenjak in Istria to the border of Montenegro, to Prevlaka. Zlatko Mihocek from Međimurje has passed the 1,090 kilometers of the Via Adriatica in 44 days. Before him, the trail, which was traced over the last three years, was crossed by two Slovenian mountaineers last year.

Following the trail, Mihocek passed through three national parks (Risnjak, Northern Velebit and Paklenica), three nature parks (Biokovo, Velebit, Učka) and several protected areas.

Twelve rivers

The Via Adriatica touches twelve rivers, and it goes through Učka, Risnjak, Velebit, Dinara, Svilaja, Kozjak, Poljička

planina, Omiška Dinara, Biokovo, Pelješac, Srđ and Sniježnica...

Mihocek is a mountain guide, he guides people with special needs in the mountains. For example, he led the blind on Dinara. He had intended to hike the Via Adriatica when he retired, he said, in a year or two, but then he decided to do it this spring, he took the 17 days left his from last year's annual leave and this year's leave, and he set off.

Beautiful Rajčica Wells

He went from Prevlaka to Kamenjak, in a northerly direction. We asked what, in his opinion, the most beautiful parts were, because more and more people want to hike one or several sections of the Via Adriatica. Mihocek paused. Silently he tried to find the answer.

To highlight something. Finally, he said: - Honestly, everything. Everything was the most beautiful to me. Really. Everything is still very fresh to me, I haven't had time to sort my impressions yet.

Still, is there anything more beautiful than beautiful?

- Coming across the location of Rajčica Wells was really nice. A set of 10 wells in the Dalmatian hinterland, the time of creation of which is still unknown, each with a diameter of six to seven meters. Biokovo and Dinara, that was also special to me. The whole trail was special though.

I've been to Nepal, Ecuador, I've visited mountains in Europe, but what makes the Via Adriatica special are spectacular views of the sea it offers along almost all the trail. On one side there is the sea, on the other the continent. As you cross over the peaks,

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you see both sides. Other countries do not have that. They only have hills.

Srećko Vukov, an enthusiast and adventurer from Zagreb and the initiator of the Via Adriatica, advises those who decide to cross one or several sections of the trail to choose those closer to populated areas because it makes the supply of food and water much easier.

200 kilometers across Velebit

- The first 70 kilometers pass through mostly populated areas of eastern Istria, touching small towns of Labin, Rabac, Raša, and Plomin. The sections of Risnjak, Vinodol and Velebit hinterlands, and Velebit and Dinara pass through the wilderness. The trail across Velebit is 200 kilometers long. Here, one should go down to villages for supplies or rely on logistics, since there are roads that cross the trail, where supplies can be delivered to hikers - says Vukov.

In unpopulated areas where the nearest civilization is a five-hour walk away, one should rely on what is in the backpack and plan well.

Halfway through the Via Adriatica there is the town of Knin, which is a good point to take a break from a strenuous hike

The Via Adriatica is the first long-distance tourist-mountain trail which extends from Istrian Kamenjak all the way to the border of Montenegro, to Prevlaka. The Via Adriatica touches twelve rivers, and it goes through Učka, Risnjak, Velebit, Dinara, Svilaja, Kozjak, Poljička planina, Omiška Dinara, Biokovo, Pelješac, Srđ and Sniježnica...

on Velebit and stock up for a relatively demanding Dinara section.

- After Dinara the trail continues to Kozjak, above Kaštela, the first of the last five sections that run along the coast, with populated areas an hour, or two at most, walk from the trail. Apart from the generally known places such as national parks, nature parks, forest parks, special reserves, the trail passes through smaller localities which are not protected by law, but coming across them is quite impressive, because of the natural beauty or their cultural and historical significance. The Via Adriatica enters Ston on Napoleon's road which hikers also encounter on Biokovo, above Brela.

Majstorska road, at the foot of Tulove Grede in southern Velebit, connects Obrovac and Sveti Rok. The road is a masterpiece of the then construction, opened for traffic in 1832. With no road incline steeper than 5.5% it would meet

the standards and regulations of the modern road construction.

90 million years old tracks

There are many remains of shepherds' dwellings on Velebit, which testify to the way of life that people in that area once lived. In Dalmatian mountains there are many churches and chapels on ridges and peaks.

On Istrian Kamenjak, there are tracks of dinosaur footprints that are almost 90 million years old. At the top of Učka there is a tower from the Austro-Hungarian era. In the hinterland of Rijeka, the trail passes by the remains of the Liburnian Limes, a Roman wall from the 3rd and 4th century which once connected Rijeka and Prezid in the municipality of Čabar in the length of almost 30 kilometers. On Kozjak, there are army bunkers which once marked the border between the Independent State of Croatia and Italy, and the Illyrian cemeteries.

| 1. Risnjak/ Zoran Jelača | 2. Comicijev toranj/ Alan Čaplar | 3. Biokovo/ Ivo Biočina | 4. Biokovo i Makarska/ Ivo Biočina | 5. The Cetina spring/ Zoran Jelača | 6. St. Ilija Chapel, Sniježnica/ Alan Čaplar | 7. Klis/ Alan Čaplar | 8. Krčić/ Aleksandar Gospić | 9. Dinara/ Aleksandar Gospić | 10. Risnjak/ Ivo Biočina | 11. Biokovo/ Zoran Jelača | 12. Risnjak/ Alan Čaplar

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*Over Učka
Mountain*

ISTRIA

Home of truffles and Malvasia

As soon as you pass through the tunnel of mighty Učka, you will feel the charm of the green heart of Croatia.

There is something about Istria that feels just right, something mild, calm, soothing. And its delights are like that: real, top-notch, but not at all exalted.

No wine, no wine lovers, no gourmands scream here, everything is quiet, pleasant, relaxed, no loud laughter, just a pleasant smile. There are a lot of Dalmatians very often in these parts.

It all started with an emperor

They come to take a break from their bursting temperament, to rest from their noisy, juicy Mediterranean, to indulge in different flavors and aromas. And so the gangs of Dalmatians visit the green hills and Istrian wine cellars from one top-rated Malvasia to another.

Namely, Istrian Malvasia has never been as good as in the last 20 years, thanks to the young winemakers who are very passionate about it. And the long history of wine started, they say, 2000 years ago, when the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius brought grapevine here.

The wine story of Istria is, like in most of the world - red and white. In addition to Malvasia, the "white" part includes excellent varieties of Chardonnay, Muscat (Momjan), Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and Sauvignon. Of course, it depends on your preferences, but whichever you order, you will hardly go wrong.

The red wine story begins with the inevitable Teran - an old Istrian indigenous variety that was first mentioned more than 600 years ago. There are also Muscat red (taste the one from Poreč), Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and two indigenous varieties from the region - Borgonja and Refnošk.

Truffle metropolis

You will taste Istrian Malvasia - an icon of modern and traditional Istria in cellars, but

also top restaurants and taverns all over Istria. And there are few places where you will eat like here. And with a top-quality Malvasia you will regularly discover new variations of dishes with truffles. And Istria is the metropolis of truffles.

You will discover them wandering along the shallow and calm Mirna river, through the mighty old oak forests near Motovun. Old oaks hide a secret about Veli Joža and truffles. The impressive, large and dense Motovun forest, which has long grown along the Mirna river, hides real gold – the high-priced white and black truffles.

This imperial delicacy is the spice, the smell, and the taste of the best dishes of Istria, which, among other things, is called the metropolis because the world's largest white truffle was found here by a truffle picker Giancarlo Zigante. That is how Istria ended up in the Guinness Book of Records. And that's why they will offer you everything there: a guided hunt for truffles, tasting in an elite restaurant, accommodation, and a story about truffles...

A quiet summer night

Connoisseurs agree: truffles are the pinnacle of gastronomy. Only specially trained dogs manage to find tubers under old oaks. Istrian white truffle is one of the most prized in the world, and on the hills along the river Mirna, there is more and more black truffle. Truffles are said to be an aphrodisiac and have been considered

an enigma and the king of the table since ancient Rome.

When you have enjoyed enough of truffles, move on. Istria, the Mediterranean closest to the heart of Europe, awaits you with hundreds of other wonders. Wander from Grožnjan to Višnjan, from Vodnjan to Buje, and then to Plovanija, Roč, Hum, Žminj - trust me, you will not regret it.

Each place has its own story, its delicacy, its special atmosphere. You won't regret it if you get stuck in a viewpoint tavern in Hum, the smallest town in the world, until late at night. The silence of a summer night, a plate of homemade pizza, a glass of Istrian Malvasia, and a pleasant chat, will remain in your memory as a serenity to be repeated.

- | 1. Istra/ Igor Seler
- | 2. Truffles and pljukanci/ Maja Danica Pečanić
- | 3. Žminj/ Igor Zirojević



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A narrow, cobblestone street in Istria, Croatia, with colorful buildings and two cyclists. The street is paved with irregular, grey cobblestones. On the left, a yellow building with a white downspout and a black metal balcony is visible. On the right, a grey stone building with a window shutter is seen. In the background, a large, ornate red building with white architectural details and blue window shutters stands prominently. Two cyclists are riding away from the camera on the cobblestone path. The cyclist in the foreground is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and shorts, riding a black bicycle with a green pannier. The second cyclist is wearing a light blue jacket and dark pants, riding a black bicycle with red panniers. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Istria by bike

ON TWO WHEELS

Through forest, over hills and to the sea

1. Bella Vista Trail (Labin)

The name of the trail speaks for itself, so be sure to choose this route on a clear day, because otherwise, you will be sorry for not being able to take better photos or enjoy spectacular views at almost every step of the trail. It is 33 kilometers long, and the start is in the old town of Labin. It leads across Gora Glušići and small villages, all the way to Skitača. From there, the trail turns back towards Labin, and along the coast returns to the town. It is moderately demanding, and the surface is excellent. 23 kilometers of asphalt, and the rest is a well-maintained macadam road.

2. On the Hermit's Trail and the Trail of Sculptures by the Famous Artist (Vrsar and Funtana)

Since the west coast of Istria is quite flat and therefore less demanding here

you can take more trails, ride more kilometers and see more. When it comes to Vrsar and Funtana, be sure to visit the two trails which form one larger loop trail with many attractions. The first is called On the Hermit's Trail, it is 9.5 kilometers long and leads from the monastery of St. Michael in the village of Kloštar above the Lim Canal to Vrsar. Connected to it is the Trail of sculptures by the famous artist, which is 9 kilometers long and goes from Vrsar to Funtana and Dušan Džamonja sculpture park, to the Agrolaguna wine road in Funtana and back to Vrsar. Both trails have a macadam surface, they are well maintained with many rest areas and benches.

3. Parenzana (Inland Istria)

I have passed many roads, trails, and paths in Istria. Each has something

to capture your attention. Churches, Roman archeological remains, beautiful vistas, vineyards, olive groves, but none of them takes the breath away like the Parenzana. It is difficult to describe the beauty of the landscape through which this trail passes, a former narrow-gauge railway line that has not been used for a hundred years. You simply have to come here and experience it. The scent, the view, the colors, the tranquility, the impressive views of the most beautiful, small Istrian towns.

The trail is 80 kilometers long, and it leads from Plovanija through Buje and Grožnjan to Livade and Motovun, then it ascends to Vižinada and continues to Poreč. 78 kilometers of the trail is macadam road. My suggestion for those who want to take a lot of photos and cycle a little less is to start from Livade. Start on a road that runs parallel to the main road



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in the direction of Buje. It is a wide and pleasant macadam road that leads through the lowlands to Ponte Porton.

4. Ližnjan (The south of Istria)

To discover the south of Istria, which I know very well, I choose the 45.5-kilometer-long Ližnjan trail, which leads from the small village of Muntić to Valtura and Nesactium and continues to Šišan. If you go down to the sea, you will reach Ližnjan and Cape Marlera in the very south of Istria. Most of the road is macadam, only 15 kilometers of the trail is asphalt. The trail is not particularly demanding, and it offers a lot to see. Its biggest advantage is that it goes by the sea, and yet it is in the wild. After Marler we head towards Nesactium. It is called the oldest Istrian town, and the

material fact that proves it is the votive altar to Emperor Gordian (3rd century) which reads "Res Publica Nesactiensium". Today, the remains of ancient and late antiquity 800 meters long rampart can be seen in this meditative place. At the very entrance to the town, between the Roman and prehistoric gates you will see a necropolis. Urns and objects which have been found here prove that people have lived there since the 9th century BC. With the suicide of the ruler Epulon, the world did not stop at Nesactium. History says that after the bloody siege in 177 BC. Romans demolished the town and built a new one in the same place.

5. Rubinum (Rovinj)

There are railways all over Istria, but they have been abandoned. Such a shame.

Today, this is evidenced by the remains of the railway, i.e. the rails and railway station in Rovinj and Kanfanar. You will pass along this forgotten railway if you take the macadam road from Rovinj to Rovinjsko Selo. This is where a section of the fantastic Rubinum bike trail is. I would recommend this trail to everyone, the beginners because it is easy, the experienced to get to know Rovinj and the history lovers to see where the railway once passed. It is 27.5 kilometers long, 22 of which is a macadam. It is a loop trail that leads from Rovinjsko Selo to the Polari camp, on to Rovinj, and back to the starting point.

| 1. Labin/ Ivan Sardi | 2. Rovinj/ Ivan Sardi | 3. The Lim Canal/ Ivan Sardi | 4. Vrsar/ Damir Kvažo | 5. Labin/ Ivan Sardi | 6. The Parenzana Trail/ Aleksandar Gospić | 7. Vrsar/ Damir Kvažo | 8. The Parenzana Trail/ Aleksandar Gospić | 9. Labin/ Ivan Sardi | 10. Rovinj/ Dejan Hren

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The Una river

THE BABY SISTER OF THE PLITVICE LAKES

Her majesty - the one and the only

Its pet name is the Queen of rivers and according to one legend, it was named after a Roman soldier, enchanted by the beauty of its crystal clear spring shouted out “Una!”, Latin for “the only one”. For that’s what it really is. One of the five rivers with the deepest spring in the world whose bottom hasn’t been reached yet, for the divers managed to dive as deep as 248 metres. Its 210km long journey starts at a remote and poorly inhabited part of Croatia, near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. It wells out in a quiet turquoise greenery of its spring, from the endless depth of a quiet lake. In August 2016, at the International Cave Diving expedition called “Rock Galaxy – the Zrmanja river, 2016”, organized by Society for the research and recording of karst phenomenon, an Italian cave diver Luigi Casati dived as deep as 248 metres setting the new world record, thus making the Una spring the deepest researched karst phenomenon in Dinaridi area.

Natural border

The Una is a natural border between Croatia and Bosnia, it used to be famous for Una railroad, its bridges were crossed by many armies, but what it still owns today is its clarity, beauty admired by all of those who set off from the spring at Donja Suvaja in Zadarska county.

For a few years now you can reach the spring by a path with wooden handrails which are a bit of a drag since you can’t grip them, as if they were made by somebody not knowing much about hand ergonomics. By the path leading to the spring, there is a hut and a board with basic information on the river which, besides carrying eight billions of cubic metres of water to the Sava river every year, is a huge, but unused potential. The entrance fee is 20 kunas.

Štrbački buk, one of the most outstanding Una destinations, dominated by a 24-metre tall waterfall and a number of smaller ones, should soon be reached by a road. Several powerful machines,

trenchers and excavators are breaking the rocks and are broadening the existing trail to turn it into an asphalt road for cars. Once it's finished, it is expected to give a real swing to new visitors ready to enjoy the wilderness of the Una.

Calm flow

From the vantage point on Croatian side, there is a beautiful view of the river flow, surrounding mountains, Una railroad, and the gurgle of water can be heard even without having seen it yet. On hot summer days, thick wood is a true refreshment. More and more rafting fans discover the Una, and since Bosnian rafting excursions are much better organized, many go rafting at the Bosnian side of the river where one can come across numerous villages, hotels and villas with pools, particularly in Lohovo and Ripče, where the Una has a more calming flow again.

The potential of Una as a tourist destination has been recognized at Plitvice Lakes national park which has launched the project of the integral economic development of Lika, the aim of which is to brand Lika and Primorje counties as tourist destinations with protected areas and as gastronomic destinations.

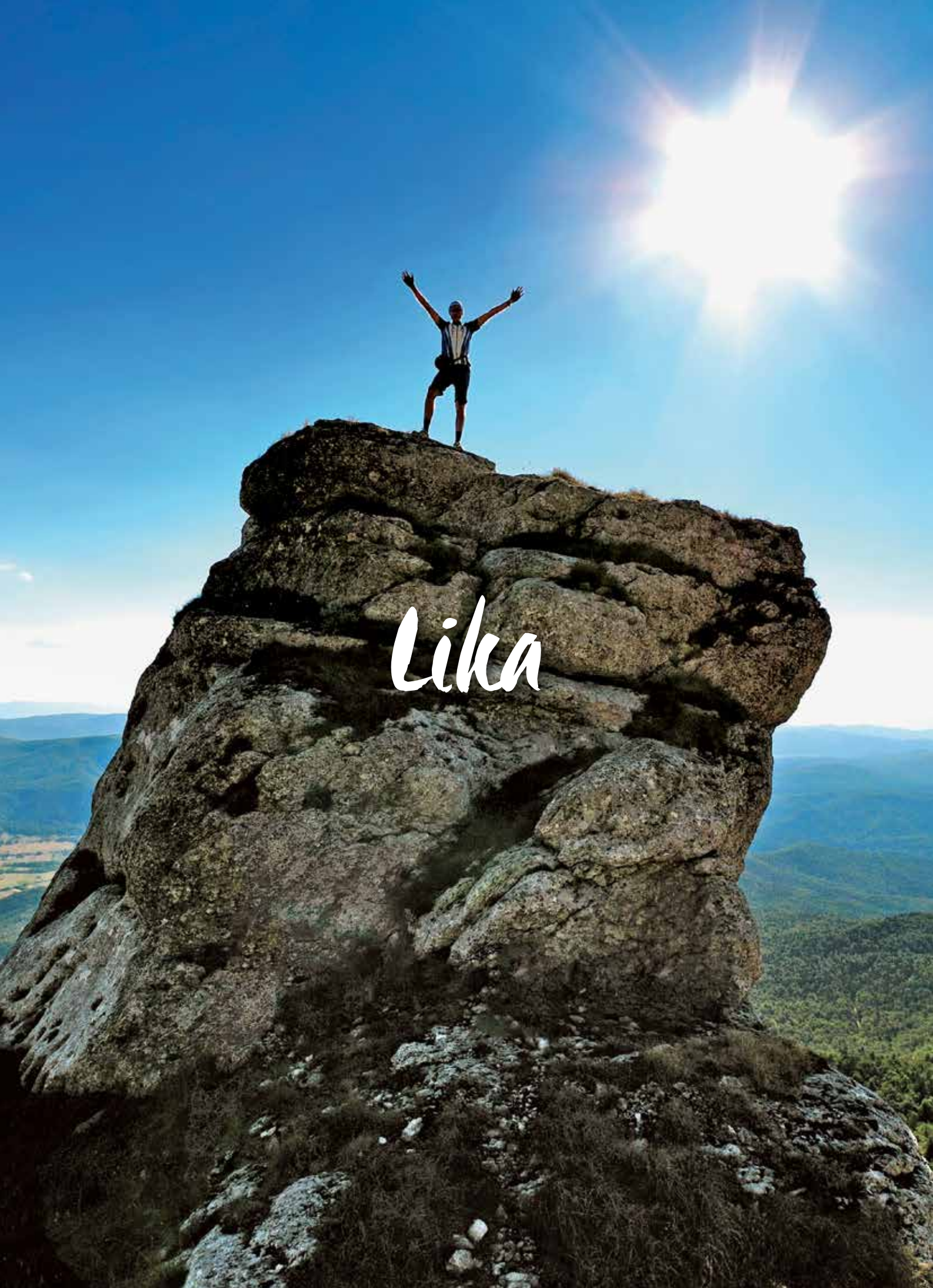
By branding Lika as a unique destination, this beautiful river opens to the public, and being relatively close to the Plitvice Lakes, there is a strong possibility of a clearer presentation of the Una to a more global market. Because out of all natural beauties, water is most appealing to tourists. By enhancing infrastructure, primarily local roads and facilities, the Una area can become a new unforgettable destination which also makes new opportunities for the service industry and the employment of local citizens, primarily in food preparation service, which is an additional motive for the economy revival of this area – thus we were told at Plitvice Lakes national park.

At Plitvice national park, the Una and its tourist contents are not seen as a competition, on the contrary, by being a socially responsible institution, it makes itself available to development since, by involving the Una into tourism, it opens numerous opportunities.

- | 1. Štrbački buk
- | 2. The Una River



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Lika

SECRET BEAUTY

The spectacle of rocks and silence

Ličko-senjska county has far too long been a transit Croatian region on the way to the sea or from the sea to the capital city, or a place to casually rest at its best. It's time to unveil Lika and present all the secrets of this beauty whose wildness calls primarily to active and adventure tourism.

If you are a motorbike rider, you'll enjoy the curving roads and tamed nature in one part of it, but if you wish to go deeper inside, go cycling, and if you prefer hiking, trekking or mountain climbing, you won't regret no matter which route you take, from Gacka valley and the Plitvice Lakes on one side, or Udbina and Kravsko field, that is its majesty Velebit from the south side.

Irreconcilable at first sight

All these routes are mutually intertwined, reconciling opposed elements at the same

time: Velebit rocks at the national park in the north, nature park in the middle part of the mountain and in the south part with Paklenica, green fields of Gacka, water harmony of the Plitvice, cave park Grabovača in Perušić area with a scientific attraction Nikola Tesla Memorial Centre at Smiljan or the Castle of Nehaj at Senj. All the routes are very well presented on Lika Tourist Community web pages, www.visit-lika.com.

Out of six motor-routes, we choose the Spectacle of rocks and silence, as we named the route from Gospić to Korenica via Sveti Rok since it seems to tell the story of true Lika best, and if you don't set off from the county centre, but from Tesla's Smiljan, the experience will be complete. After a 32-kilometre drive through the inland, you'll reach a place at the bottom of Velebit called Sveti Rok where you turn to Velebit all the

way to Mali Alan, a mountain pass with the highest peak at 1044 metres. You'll be travelling by Majstor road, built by Austrian-Hungarians 200 years ago to join Croatian north and south. This area served as the scenery of Wild West during the shooting of a film about the Indian chief Winnetou by Karl May, and under Tulove grede, you'll find his film grave. After that, you head back to Lika, but not before you take the breath-taking view of the Zadar aquatory. Through Kravsko field via Udbina you'll reach Korenica, and if you go on, you'll reach the Plitvice Lakes after about 30 kilometres. Motorcycle routes should be taken in spring and autumn.

Amazing scenery

With its 150 kilometres of length, with its protected areas and magnificent scenery offering a large number of



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appealing paths coming one after another with 35 control points, Velebit is certainly Croatian most attractive walking promenade. But one must be careful and respect the wild side of the mountain, so we're leaving it to mountain climbers. We recommend something more tamed to hikers, but not less attractive. Two routes, a longer and a shorter one at Otočac and Gospić, have become parts of the Walking Festival since last year and this takes place every second weekend in September. The participants are given starting numbers, refreshments, fruit, even a ride between the two towns in case you want to combine these two routes. The organizers welcome more 1000 hikers from all parts of Croatia and from abroad. The paths are between 10 and 30 kilometres long, there are no age limits to take part in this unique recreation-tourist event.

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Lika offers about 50 marked cycling tracks, approximately between six and eight on seven main points. Although the Plitvice Lakes are far from not being familiar among tourists, cycling around them definitely gives a new dimension

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of experiencing this pearl. There are seven tracks, from the recreation ones around the lake, to the more difficult mountain ones over the slopes of Plješevica. One of the longest tracks is the one from Korenica to the upper Plitvice Lakes passing by the less exposed pearls, the Black and White river. The route leading through Korenica field follows a small river called Matica, all the way to its going underground and then you'll climb a beautiful vantage point. Adventurers should take Plješivica route which occasionally goes as high as 1000 metres above the sea level, leading over the hills of Mrsinje and on old shepherd paths before going down to Korenica field. The track is 36.5 km long, a combination of paths and roads, and the way down is a path partially rocky, so one should be careful.

Besides experiencing the phenomenon of karst waters, both the Plitvice Lakes and the Black and White river and Plitvice creek which turns into the Great Plitvice waterfall in its last part, at Plitvice village and Korana village you can see some traditional Plitvice houses, a mill and a sawmill, and the route takes you to Šupljara, a cave in the east part of the Lower Lakes.

- | 1. Gola Plješivica/ Aleksandar Gospić
- | 2. Gospić/ Aleksandar Gospić
- | 3. Delnice/ Ivo Biočina
- | 4. Majerovo vrilo/ Goran Sekula
- | 5. Udbina/ Ivo Biočina
- | 6. Smiljan/ Ivo Biočina
- | 7. Senj/ Goran Sekula
- | 8. The Gacka River spring/ Zoran Jelača
- | 9. Plitvice/ Aleksandar Gospić
- | 10. Grabovača cave park/ Ivo Biočina



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Velebit

NATURE PARK

The father of Croatian national parks

In the great Croatian family of national parks, Velebit is - the father. Its boundaries from Vratnik in the north and Senj at the sea travel towards south following the Adriatic coast for another 145 kilometres, all the way to the Zrmanja estuary where it takes a turn towards the continental foot of Lika. As vast as 30 kilometres at some places and never less than 10 kilometres, with more than 2270 square kilometres of area and numerous cliffs and karst sinkholes, ridges, glades and peaks, 130 out of which are higher than 1370 metres, this nature park is our largest and most complex protected area and has been the part of UNESCO international network of biosphere reservation for more than 40 years.

Two-faced mountain

If you want to see all of it, you have to go up in the air for on at least 8000 metres

above the sea, and then you'll see its two faces: the sea face – karstic and barren like the surface of the moon, wrinkled with rocks, and the land part, tamer and mostly covered with forests. These two sceneries blend at the top part of the karst.

We find as many as two national parks on Velebit: The North Velebit and Paklenica, a part protected as a nature park, in addition to a special reservation of forest flora called Štirovača, Cerovačke caves, a geomorphic nature monument, an extraordinary cove called Zavratnica with its significant scenery and Velnačka glavica, a geological-paleontological nature monument with 32 species of fossil flora and fauna left intact from older geological past – Permian.

This area is the most significant floristic area in Croatia, and European-wide, it is one of the most important areas of bio-variety which gives habitat to about

2000 plant species, let's just mention those famous on our mountain: *Degenia velebitica*, Adriatic bellflower and fairy thimble bellflower. Reminding us of a huge Noah's Ark rising over the Adriatic, thriving with life, it is the habitat of three wild beasts, a bear, a wolf and a lynx, the most frequent herbivore is a fawn, but there are chamois, mouflons, deer, fallow deer, rabbits and boars, while otters can be found along all of the Zrmanja's flow. There are 23 species of bats and as many as 257 bird species.

A bit of something for anybody

Besides the Zrmanja, the Lika and the Gacka are its most significant rivers, but it's important to say there are significant amounts of underground drinking water in all of the park area and thus there are two hydroelectric power plants – HE Senj and HE Obrovac.



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What does Velebit offer to tourists? Anything you can wish for. The only question is – how much can you take from it? It satisfies the needs of hikers and mountaineers, of cyclists and motorcyclists, of families with children and adventurers, of extreme sport lovers and romantics, of explorers and even of those lazy ones. Moreover, it gets you closer to the sun, at the same time realizing how small you are under the stars.

If you really want to get to know it, you'll have to be doing that all your life, and if you want to see all of it, you'll need to spend your entire vacation on it, but if you just feel like saying hello to it quickly and go the other way, half an hour at the multimedia Velebit House at Krasno should be enough where, thanks to modern technology, you can see 3D footages of life on the mountain, hear the sounds, even feel the smells and go down its deepest underground cave, the Luka's cave – by an elevator (of course, it's just a simulation).

It is ungrateful to make the list of its top beauties as a sort of a guide book to must-sees on Velebit when the first place could be given to at least a few dozen sites, but we'll leave out Paklenica and North Velebit this time since these areas will be presented in other travel reports, so we'll give more attention to some micro-locations not so much recognized by the public, being led by some more subjective impressions.

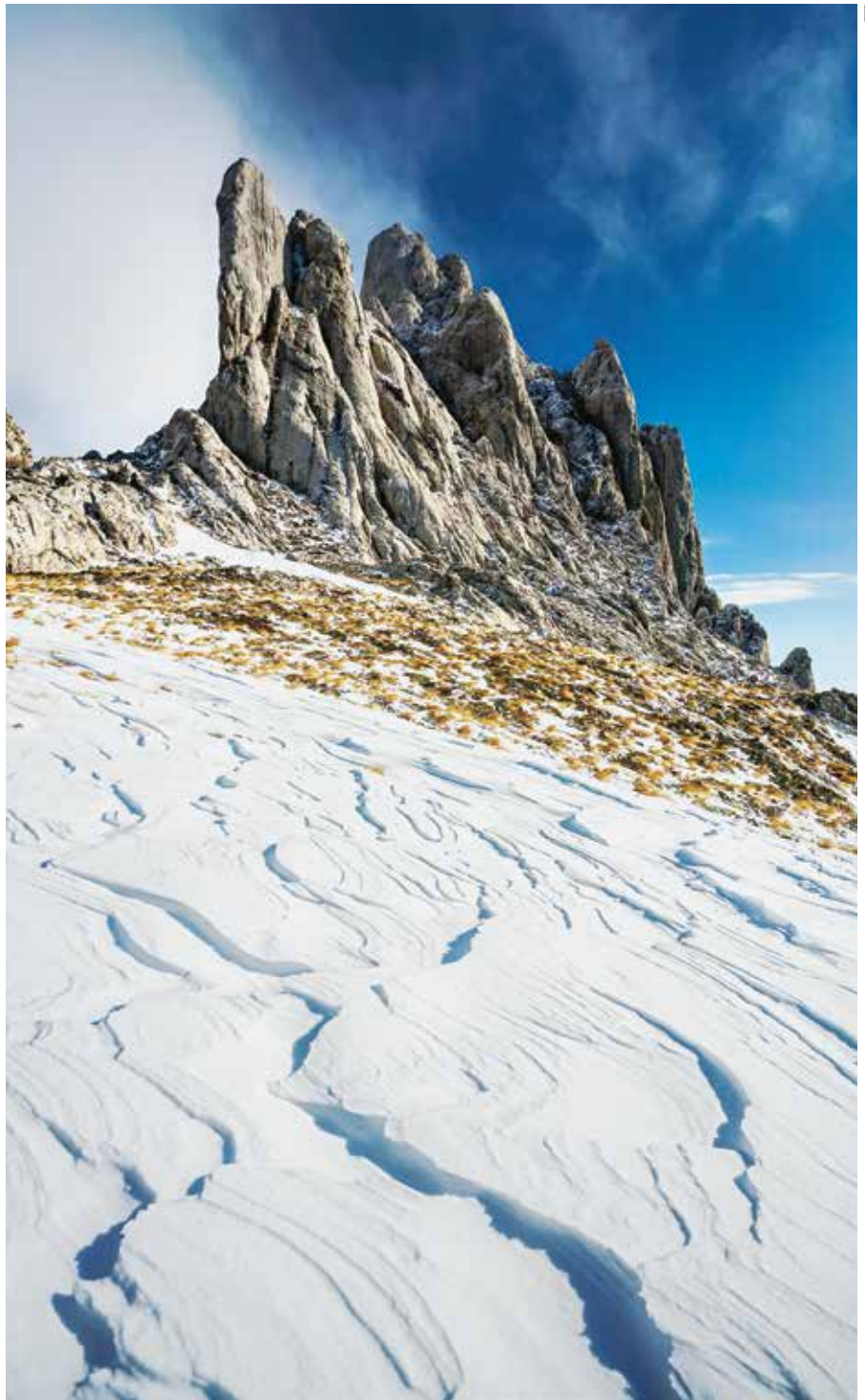
Majestic waterfalls and a fairy-tale cove

Zavratinca cove is a place each man must see at least once in his/her life since, unless you're a world traveller, you'll hardly ever see another cove as beautiful as this one. Here, the sea has taken from the mountain



more than it was willing to give it, or the mountain has taken hold this endless blue itself – that's how it looks like, depending on whether you're reaching it by a path following the coastline from Jablanac or you're going down a hiking path from Zavrtnica village. The shadows are playing with the navy blue shades of the sea, with the shiny greyness of rocks and the greenness of vegetation. The experts will describe it as a valley flooded from the canyon cliffs about 100 metres high, 900 metres long and 150 metres wide, made within the layers from the Cretaceous period forming, due to enormous fragmentation, numerous rock creeps stopped by abutments.

Cerovačke caves are in the south part of the continental area of the park and are considered one of the most famous and most significant speleological objects in Croatia. They consist of three caves with more than seven kilometres of explored channels, and the visitors can see one tenth of this fascinating space. It abounds in many archaeological remains, and it is one of the largest archaeological sites of the cave bear in Croatia. You will witness a thousand-year old formation of stalactites and stalagmites, but make sure you dress warmly since temperature down here is between 5 and 8 degrees Celsius. However, bear in mind that at the moment, and this goes for the rest of the year, Cerovačke caves are closed due to reconstruction of tracks and lights. A true paradise for hikers and climbers, an educational trail called Kudin most (a bridge), is recognized only by true nature lovers, partially due to the amazing Zrmanja canyon which has been taking all the glory for its natural beauties in Obrovac area for years now. It is on the Krupa, one of the tributaries of the Zrmanja, where you can experience majestic waterfalls and tufa cascades.



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Hiking from Golubić village to Kudin most, you'll be following a blue-green tiny river with Deveterac, a tufa barrier with nine cascades, ending with a high waterfall which is bridged over by Kudin bridge, a drystone bridge with 12 arches built at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century. It takes two hours to hike over 1600 metres.

Besides Zavrtnica, there are two more educational paths on Velebit – Terezijana, a part of the old Austrian-Hungarian road from 1786 which used to connect Gospić and Karlobag, and Starigrad Senjski and Donja Klada built in 1847 to connect two villages on the coast, Starigrad and Lukova.

There are also 14 hiking paths which are more intensive and demanding than the educational ones, but some may be mastered by even those with the lack of hiking abilities. One of the most famous ones is Premužićeva path, starting in a wood below Badanj summit in the area of Baške Oštarije, and ending on Zavižan, in the area of North Velebit national park, the area also including a path starting at Veliki

Alan which can be the starting point of this path. This path is 16 kilometres long and there is a mountain refuge called Rossijeva koliba. The purpose of Premužićeva path is to easily reach the most inaccessible parts of Velebit, including Hajdučki and Rožanski kukovi. From this path, which is 57 kilometres long, you can take a turn towards some of the most beautiful summits of North and Middle Velebit – Gromovača, Crikvena and Šatorina.

Don't even try to conquer Visibaba, also known as Agin kuk, Čelina kuk or Rujičin kuk, leave those to more experienced mountain climbers. Adrenalin batteries can be charged by going rafting or canoeing down the Zrmanja from Kaštel Žegarski to the bridge at Muškovci or by cycling on one of the fifteen well-beaten cycling tracks. If you are a more comfortable type and want to enjoy the beauties through the windshield of your own car, you can do that, too. Moreover, take Velebit historical roads, we recommend Majstorska road. It connected Sveti Rok to Obrovac via Mali Alan 200 years ago, connecting Zadar to Vienna at the same time.

It took seven years to build a 41-kilometre route and it was a remarkable building venture with lots of serpentines over cliffs and ridges. Besides enjoying the view of the Adriatic Sea and literally cross the motorway tunnel tube leading from Sveti Rok to the sea coast, this is the simplest way to Tulove grede, a group of limestone towers which marked the scenery for the popular Winnetou chief, who is resting below them, naturally, in the world of film fiction.

Paklenica being the symbol of south Velebit, and North Velebit itself being a park with significant national attributes, then Middle Velebit is marked by Dabarski kukovi – a range of sharp rocky summits coming out of beaver woods and karst sinkholes, parallelly stretched alongside the coast. You can easily approach it from Baške Oštarije, there are forest paths from the north-east side, Crni and Ravni dabar. There are ten summits in the neighbouring area with the best and most long-distanced views of the entire mountain.

| 1. Velebit/ Alan Čaplar | 2. Zavrtnica cove/ Ivan Čorić | 3. Velika Paklenica stream/ Alan Čaplar | 4. Sveto brdo, Velebit/ Aleksandar Gospić | 5. Tulove grede/ Zoran Jelača | 6. Zavižan/ Aleksandar Gospić | 7. Dabarski kukovi/ Aleksandar Gospić | 8. Velebit/ Alan Čaplar | 9. Zavižan/ Ivan Čorić | 10. The Gacka River/ Goran Sekula | 11. Velebit/ Aleksandar Gospić | 12. Zavižanska kotlina/ Alan Čaplar | 13. Premužićeva hiking trail/ Alan Čaplar

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*The Zrmanja
and the Krupa*

SUPREME MOTIVES

The queen and the princess of the Velebit karst

When the summer sun scorches grey stones of Dalmatian inland, a random traveller frequently thinks if at least there was some refreshing water in the area.

Not even the view from Dalmatina (popular name for Zagreb-Split motorway) curving among the slopes of Velebit reveals all the charms hidden in the canyons squeezed amidst karst plains since they are thriving with life. A life that the Zrmanja river brings into the bosom of the porous limestone and its sprightly tributary – the Krupa with Krnjez. Where Velebit turns into Bukovica, on the northern unmarked boundaries of Dalmatia, challenging destinations are hiding, still away from mass tourism where one can search for an ideal refuge in the summer, far from packed town promenades and beaches overcrowded with deck chairs.

In the late spring

Whatever season you choose to visit the area between Obrovac and Knin, late spring when rivers and their springs flood after the snow melts from the mentioned mythical mountain and when underground rivers rush towards the Adriatic Sea, or the middle of too hot summer or even autumn, the scenes to be seen will be the best prize for your fatigue. Freshness, green oases at the heart of karst and, unfortunately, rare flocks of sheep and tribes of goats will surely make you come back.

The lifeblood of Bukovica is whimsical Zrmanja, a river with six canyons which in summer, escapes underground ten kilometres after its spring in the southeast part of Lika in order to give a part of its water to the Krka, returning to its bed in this time of year only twenty kilometres towards west, before opening Žegarsko field from where it snakes through an impressive canyon towards Obrovac and its mouth in the Novigradsko sea. This particular “gate” among rocky shores are the most challenging part of the entire area and rafting fans from all over the world flock here to go down tiny waterfalls, around

tufa barriers, those river necklaces, and then go downstream to Muškovci.

This is an area belonging to municipality of Ervenik and the town of Obrovac, between Šibensko-kninska and Zadarska county, one of the least inhabited in Croatia. But the people who still haven't said goodbye to the karst of Bukovica cherish the tradition of cattle breeding, milk production, even mills, for instance the Mill of Ušljebrka in Žegarsko field, built at the end of 19th century. It's worth stopping at the Žegar village of Nadvoda where the Zrmanja is arched with a beautiful, renewed stone bridge, regarded a true monument of building culture.

Pearls of karst

However, the real pearl of karst is hidden even deeper in the bosom of Velebit. It's the Krupa river, only seven kilometres long before its mouth at the Zrmanja, and a part of its story is the Krnjeza, too, a clear creek drawn into the canyon by every metre of its short flow. These zones still haven't been included into mass tourism maps nor can be reached by vast roads what makes them even more enjoyable for the inhabitants of the greater Zadar area, and thus are more frequently visited by guests from Šibenik, Split and foreign tourists.

The Krupa has 19 supreme waterfalls, the most famous one being Deveterac, named after nine tufa cascades, ending with a 13-metre high waterfall. After a playful springing part, where water is partly used for commercial purposes, the river shortly calms down at the small field called Manastirska luka, named after the nearby

Christian orthodox monastery, a place with rich culture. It's an ideal place for hikers since it provides deep shade and vast space to enjoy nature or even barbecue in provided areas.

Only a kilometre and a half downstream there is a unique monument to a love story – Kude bridge. The legend says a young man from Veselinović family, nicknamed Kude, built a bridge with 12 arches made of tufa at the end of 18th and the beginning of 19th century in order to reach his sweetheart on the left shore of the Krupa. This protected cultural monument can be reached by paths leading from the monastery itself or by going down a path from the village of Ravni Golubić where one can take a break at the local inn, knock on the door of local farmers to buy some excellent goat cheese or simply admire the view of Velebit cliffs.

We believe these are reasons enough to visit this part of Dalmatia which at first seems distant from the main roads, but in reality is so close to nature lovers' hearts offering sights to make you relax, far away from the red-hot city asphalt.

- | 1. The Zrmanja River/ Aleksandar Gospić
- | 2. The Zrmanja Canyon/ Ivo Biočina
- | 3. The Krupa River/ Zoran Jelača



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Sinj

CETINA

Adrenaline oasis

We asked experts to recommend an itinerary for an extended weekend in Cetinska krajina, an area rich in cultural and historical offer, natural beauty, adventurous sports and gastronomy. Given the offer, it didn't take them long to respond.

It is best to start with Nutjak fortress, which was built by Žarko Dražojević, the prince of Poljica, whose grave is in the cathedral of St. Duje, and whose epitaph was written by Marko Marulić (a famous Croatian writer from the 15th century)

Then we go to the church of St. Peter in Gardun, from where there is a view of the entire Trilj region, the river Cetina and a large part of Sinjsko polje. On Gardun-Tiluri we will see the remains of the soldiers' dormitory of the 7th Roman Legion from the 1st century.

In the Trilj Regional Museum we will see the findings of archeological excavations of Tiluria, and then we will go to the tower on Čačvnina, a medieval guardian of roads leading from Dalmatia to Bosnia and vice versa. From Čačvina we descend to Grab and a beautiful, pearl spring of the river with the same name. A few hundred meters downstream are 600-year-old mills, where grain is still ground today.

Otok boat

Two more beautiful springs should be visited, those of the Ruda river and the Ovrlje river, located along the Path to Our Lady of Sinj, which leads from Rama to Sinj. On the banks of the Cetina we will see the Otok boats. The art of building Otok boats is enlisted in the Register of protected Croatian cultural goods. Going upstream we reach the

Kosinac spring, which has supplied Sinj with drinking water since 1912. Another few hundred meters upstream there is the bridge on Han, the oldest in the region, and the unique mill on Mostina.

The tour of Sinj starts at the hippodrome and a visit to the Alkar Stables. From the sports airport we will go on a panoramic flight over the Cetina region. The old town of Sinj is an open-air museum. In Vrlička Street is the house of the most successful Alkar, Nikola Cerinić, who won 12 Alka races. There is also the two-thousand-year-old stela of the boy Gaius Laberius with a ball in his hand, which testifies to the Cetina region as the cradle of football.

In the main square there is the church of Our Lady of Sinj, with the doors which depict migration from Rama to Sinj in 1687., the work of a sculptor Stipe Sikirica.



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In the church is the image of Mother of Mercy, Our Lady of Sinj, the pearl of the biggest Marian shrine in southern Croatia. Next to the church is the Franciscan monastery, which houses five historic collections, the most valuable of which is the archeological one, the fourth most valuable in Croatia due to the unique artifacts from the ancient city of Aequum.

View from Kamičak

Above Sinj stands Kamičak, a Venetian fortress from 1712 and a clock tower with a bell mechanism which is 30 years older than that of London's Big Ben. Next to Kamičak is Palacina, a building which is currently being renovated and which houses the Museum of the Cetinska Krajina region.

Grad, a fortress from which the people of Sinj defended their freedom in 1715. against Ottoman invaders, who outnumbered the defenders by more than a hundred times, is being renovated too. To honor the glorious victory, the knight's game of Sinjska Alka was founded. Grad fortress offers a view of the entire Cetina region, which is dominated by the votive church of St. Barbara and by the statue of the Mother of

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Mercy, a guardian of the region, the work of a sculptor Josip Marinović.

After we descend from Grad, we will visit the pearl of Sinj, the Alkarski dvori, and the Museum of Sinjska Alka. The museum exhibition was opened in 2015 and soon became widely acknowledged. The Alkarski dvori also houses the Sikirica Gallery with more than 500 works donated by Stipe Sikirica to Sinj.

One should, of course, see the Alka racetrack, where Sinjska Alka has been held every year since its founding in 1715. At the beginning of the racetrack there is a statue of Alkar, the work of Stipe Sikirica, which has been a part of the visual identity of Sinj since 1965.

In the shade of Česma

From Sinj we will go through Hrvace, the spring of Vojskova, Miloš Lake, the bridge on Panj, Peruća Lake, the tower above Potravnik of the Kotromanić line to Vrljika. Not far from the bathing area in Garjak is Šembrun, where the Emperor Franjo Josip rested. In Vrljika there is Česma spring. In the shade of Česma Milan Begović wrote a libretto for the most performed Croatian opera "Ero from the Other World".

Above Vrljika stands a fortress, Prozor from which we descend to the early Christian church of St. Salvation from the 9th century, and we end the tour by visiting Glavaš, the main spring of the Cetina river.

1. Sinjska alka/ Damir Fabijanić
2. Sinj/ Ivo Biočina
3. Our Lady of Sinj/ Ivo Biočina
4. Sinjska alka/ Ivo Pervan
5. Sinj/ Davor Rostuhar
6. The Cetina River/ Ivo Biočina
7. Arambašići/ Maja Danica Pečanić
8. Sinjska Alka/ Sergio Gobbo
9. Sinj field/ Ivo Pervan
10. Sinjska alka/ Ivo Pervan



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Imotski

HEART OF ZAGORA

Peace, silence, and some crickets

What has happened in the heart of the Dalmatian hinterland? - a friend who has been living and working in the north of Germany for decades asked me the other day.

- Some Danish friends of mine told me that they would go to Croatia this year. They said their friends who had been there the year before recommended Imotski. How did this unknown tourist area turn into a tourist mecca overnight, he asked.

Why do Danes rush to Imotski

- Perhaps I may come with my wife and kids. You know that I love nature, recreation, peace, silence, good food. I love archeology, good fun, and, most of all, I enjoy exploring new places. Well, I'll come at least for a weekend to see this miracle.

But give me some tips to make most of my weekend. If I like it, I might stay for another day or two. After all, I have to see for myself why even picky Danes rush there, a friend from Kiel told me.

- Well, do come - I said and sent him some details to help him get into the very soul of the Imotski region and this beautiful part of the Dalmatian hinterland.

- I told him that it is a 60-minute drive from Split Airport in Kaštela to Imotski. I advised him not to take the highway from Dugopolje to Zagvozd, but to get off at Bisko exit and slowly head towards Cista Velika and Imotski.

Well, I thought to myself, since you love archeology, there is a phenomenal archeological site of Crkvina and Crljevica in Cista Velika. In the area of

the municipality of Cista Provo there are 15 cultural goods, archaeological heritage, sacral architectural heritage, cultural and historical ensemble...

Archaeological site Crljevica is located in Cista Velika, along the main road Trilj - Imotski, in the length of about 200 meters. It is a complex archaeological site that has several stages of development. South of Velika Crljevica, there is a sinkhole with seven wells dating back to the Middle Ages. Beautiful stećak tombstones all around...

Around the lake

When you have explored that, go on and take the local road Lovreć - Nikolići - Dolića Draga to the most beautiful lookout point in the Imotski region. The view of the vast green Imotski field, the Lokvičić Lakes, and Prološko Blato Lake is breathtaking.



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If you love cycling, a tour around the lake is a must. And if you are a fisherman, get your fishing rod and you will catch good carp. Up north in the valley of beautiful Ričice is an artificial Green Lake. If you like sailing, here's your opportunity to give it a try, if you like rowing, you don't need the sea, here is your track for real regattas. It's been half a day, you haven't eaten yet, and you like to taste good food. Well, let's go to the spring of the beautiful Vrljika River. The water is so clean you will want to drink it, but the host is already waiting.

- Here is some homemade herb or grape brandy for my guests, maybe some walnut or cherry brandy for the lady, to whet your appetite. It's made from these walnuts and cherries right next to the house. The appetizer is homemade prosciutto and healthy goat cheese.

A short break with local, top-quality Kujundžuga wine. And then here's the veal 'ispod saća' (baked under a bell-shaped metal lid) with potatoes and lettuce from our garden, the organic product. Then comes the lamb on the

spit. The lamb had grazed on nearby hills, where immortelle and basil grow. It is a scenario that is difficult to reject.

Later in the afternoon is the best time to go down to Blue Lake for a swim. It is peaceful down there, the birds are chirping, water is fresh, and you can even drink it while you swim. It's clean, tested, something you haven't experienced before. I know you stay longer, but we have a few more things to do before we call it a day, well the first day at least.

It is already evening, time for the premiere of "Hasanaginica", a famous love ballad originated in Imotski. The ballad, translated even by Goethe and Pushkin, is performed by amateur actors from Imotski, at the top of Topana fortress. Right at the spot where the heroine Hasanaginica threw herself into death. Two hours of pure joy if you love open-air theater.

Imotski cake and rafioli

In the evening, it is best to eat something light, such as breaded frogs caught here

in Imotski field. Here in the north of the town, peace and quiet await you, only a few crickets and a good night's sleep. And the environment of the heart of the Dalmatian hinterland is the Makarska Riviera, Medjugorje, the mountains of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the beautiful Blidinje...

If you want to stay in Imotski, you should visit the Franciscan Museum or the Imotski Homeland Museum, to see the rich heritage of the region. The next day we will go for a delicious barbecue, again by the Vrljika River. And for dessert, the famous Imotski cake and rafioli are a must. And after that we will go cycling again, because you love it. We can go around the Blue and Red Lakes to Ričice and then descend to the Imotski field and enjoy the scent of vines, mountain immortelle, and basil for kilometres.

So we give the Imotski region, the heart of the Dalmatian hinterland, for the enjoyment of all who come.

| 1. Red Lake/ Sergio Gobbo | 2. Imotski/ Ivo Biočina | 3. Dalmatian hinterland/ Ivo Biočina | 4. Dalmatian hinterland/ Sergio Gobbo | 5. Blue Lake/ Ivo Biočina
| 6. Dalmatian hinterland/ Luka Tambača | 7. Imotski/ Sergio Gobbo | 8. Rafioli/ Damir Fabijanić | 9. Smoked ham / Maja Danica Pečanić
| 10. Lamb and veal/ Maja Danica Pečanić | 11. Bread baked under 'sać' / Maja Danica Pečanić

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An aerial photograph of the Neretva river delta. The river flows from the top center towards the bottom right, branching into numerous narrow channels that create a series of long, narrow, rectangular islands. These islands are covered in dense, vibrant green vegetation. The water in the channels and the larger body of water to the right is a deep, clear blue. In the background, a range of blue mountains stretches across the horizon under a clear, bright blue sky. The overall scene is a lush, natural landscape.

*Neretva
river paradise*

DELTA

From Baćina Lakes to Rujnica Hill

The Neretva Valley is a real paradise for many visitors, both domestic and foreign. The unique landscape of the delta is enriched by the Baćina Lakes, which are often the final destination of tourists and excursionists staying on the Dubrovnik or Makarska Riviera. On the Baćina Lakes, visitors can enjoy rides in the traditional Neretva boats, which have been saved from oblivion by the Boat Marathon. So, thanks to the Neretva enthusiasts, the boat rides have become an indispensable part of the tourist offer, along with local cuisine.

Eels and frogs

Frog and eel specialties dominate the traditional Neretva cuisine, such as the inevitable frog and eel stew, breaded frogs, eels on a spit. Or perhaps you prefer boiled coot. When it comes to Dalmatian brudet (fish stew), the

Neretva variety is different. It's spiced with hot peppers, which give a specific and delicious taste. It can be very hot, so those who don't like spicy food should order theirs to be prepared a bit milder. The Neretva cuisine is unthinkable without frogs. The crackling of frogs from the swamp turns into a rhapsody of frogs on a plate in dishes like frog risotto, breaded frogs, frogs in prosciutto. Homemade hearth bread is usually served with those dishes. Apart from untouched nature, the Neretva boat rides, local delicacies and exploring flora and fauna of the wetland area, the Neretva valley has a lot more to offer. Excursion programs in the Neretva delta include photo safaris, visits to the Archaeological Museum of Naron and the Natural History Museum in Metković, as well as picking figs, mandarins and lemons on plantations, which has become a tourist hit. The

Natural History Museum contains more than 340 bird preparations, among which are 218 species out of 310 registered in the Neretva Valley. The preparations are displayed in corresponding habitats, which provides an insight into the former lushness of life in wetlands, swamp forests, thickets, reeds, rocky areas, and reclaimed and cultivated fields.

110 species of migratory birds land here

More than 110 species of migratory birds resting in the Neretva delta have been registered so far, which says enough about its significance. There are various types of ducks, herons, terns, eagles, and rods, which is a real treat for bird and nature lovers. Birdwatching has become an unavoidable part of the tourist offer of the Neretva delta.

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There is also a unique program where rural tourism is imbued with an adventurous spirit. The exciting excursion program begins with a pirate attack on a coach full of foreign tourists who are 'kidnapped' by Norin's pirates and taken to work on plantations, where they pick strawberries, figs, tangerines, lemons or olives depending on the season.

But don't worry, it is not difficult and arduous work. People pick strawberries, figs, or tangerines and taste them. And all with the sounds of music, so it often happens that tourists start singing and dancing in the field. Arriving at a plantation full of tangerines is a new, almost mystical experience for guests. Sweet fruits are picked with a little help from pirates and the sounds of music in the air. And that's not all. Homemade ecological products, such as jams, marmalades, and natural juices, are tasted on the plantations too.

In addition to picking tangerines, or other fruit depending on the season,

guests looking for fun and adventure can choose the program called "On the Illyrians and shepherds' paths", and thus revive the long-forgotten shepherds' paths while hiking on Rujnica Hill. Arriving at the church of St. Roch, they ring the bell, which is a sign that they have successfully climbed.

Reward - a laborer meal

Through olive groves and dry stone walls, you get to the rocky southern slope of Rujnica, where after an hours' walk along the Ruski path, we reach the saddle between Velika and Mala Rujnica, at 330 meters above sea level. From the top, there is a beautiful view of the fertile Neretva valley and towns. As a reward for climbing to the top of the hill, guests are offered a laborer meal of homemade cheese, bacon, and bread baked under "sač," a metal, bell-shaped, baking lid.

Boat rides in the swamp, tasting indigenous specialties, tasting homemade

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brandies, tangerine and fig juices and liqueurs are just a part of the local tourist offer. In addition to one-day excursions, multi-day arrangements are often organized. These include an even more detailed exploration of the Neretva Valley, boat trips to the Neretva Channel, and visits to wine cellars on Pelješac.

- | 1. The Neretva River
- | 2. Eels and frogs/ Maja Danica Pečanić
- | 3. Boat marathon/ Luka Tambaca
- | 4. Baćina Lakes/ Ivo Biočina
- | 5. The Neretva River
- | 6. The Neretva River
- | 7. The Neretva Valley/ Boris Kragić
- | 8. Narona/ Ivo Biočina
- | 9. Baćina Lakes/ Domagoj Blažević
- | 10. Metković/ Domagoj Blažević
- | 11. The traditional Neretva boats



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