



Croatia Trip Notes: The Dalmatian Coast **September 16 – 29, 2015**

Highlights:

- Gorgeous natural scenery with Mediterranean water everywhere, abutting the rocky cliffs. Almost too many rocks for hiking.
- Kind, generous, smart and good looking population who eat the most natural and healthy seasonal foods. Lots of eating with my tour. Too much eating with my tour.
- Amazing that they cleaned up from their early '90s war when they suffered major devastation.
- A French Riviera? Competing scenery but not yet fully developed for tourists.

Hiking:

- On this trip, hiking was minimal. It was rocky. If we hiked 3 hours in a day, it was a lot.
- Hiking allowed for seeing the small and nearly deserted towns which are starting to come back.
- Monasteries were numerous, out of the way, and required hiking to get to them.
- I bought trekking poles on my first day and needed them at least one day, and part of the second. Fortunately the leader was glad to get them when I left. (Airline security won't allow them in hand carry baggage.)
- Probably only one picture of me the entire trip and that because we got held up on this coast line while blood was cleaned off one of our fallen hikers. She turned out to be okay just bandaged.



Old fortresses, walled cities:

- They were numerous and we saw many, both on the hike and my day trips.
- Tourists love walking the ramparts, so war-ravaged fortress towns have wisely rebuilt their walls.
- They are well lit at night making for stunning pictures.
- Dubrovnik had been seized and occupied for much of the war.
- Museums of the war are emotional.

Cruise ships:

- A better way to get into the area until roadways are improved, but one should stay on land overnight to get a proper view.
- Cruise ships inundate the small towns making them feel infested during the day. The docking locations are not ideal and the locals have little tolerance for them.
- The clear Mediterranean waters, islands, and harbors are the main sights, followed by the walled towns.

Pictures – I probably have 600 pictures on disk but do we really need them? You have the internet. I have my memory (sometimes) and the following iPhone pictures tell enough of the story. To top it off, there are so many 'selfie-twits' out there that I've become embarrassingly camera shy.

Daily notes home:

Getting To Croatia - I'm off to hike the Dalmatian coast of Croatia with a few days on either side in first palace town Split then after in the walled city Dubrovnik. This is my kind of thing.

Flying with a new passport turned out, so far, to be ok. A renewal took changing Global Entry and united airlines information. TSA pre-check worked. Now if entry back into the U.S. at the kiosk works I'll be lucky.

I stupidly forgot all my picnic lunch of sandwiches and crackers but took care of the loss while in the United Club. I shouldn't worry about starving as First class food is on order. Yet I do travel and live on my PB&J sandwiches.

United earned their poor reputation on my way out of Newark. They claimed the cabin wasn't cleaned and thus everybody boarded pre first class cabins. They've been more than excellent to me most times but I'm clear that their reputation doesn't touch that of the old Continental. Maybe the removal of the top three execs will help. I once sat next to ex CEO Gordon Bethune and he of course was lamenting the good old days of past. So true.

My senior attendant is a haughty Asian and sitting next to me is a very big short man with long beard and black beanie cap. Oh goodness but that's not very nice and I'm sure to have not even thought it had he been 100 pounds less. Fortunately we have our own little "cabins".

Wine I need. Whine I do. Is waited for a drink but then got boarded 45 minutes late. One hour plus late taking off.

Tenderloin of beef with Asiago broth, asparagus and gnocchi should help.

Oh awful. Santiago just had a 7.9 quake. One hour ago I was looking to go there again.

United is working up to an even badder reputation. Smile. Late then later. Couldn't get baggage loaded. Kept giving us one after another delay report. Then the video system malfunctioned so in thirty minutes we will know if a reboot works. Oops. A second try at rebooting so nearly an hour. Now I hear that some on the plane were on yesterday's flight but a technical problem canceled the flight. The longer and more delays, the chance of my missing my connection looms. The special food for Mr. Beanie can't be found but he was very nice about it. He won't wither away.

As I sit, my phone pops up with a notice of delayed flight. It tells of a scheduled departure long past due. My seat mate speaks glowingly of American Airlines. I can agree today but statistics suggest the two airlines are in a dead heat for bad customer relations. Oh, to have Gordon Bethune back in the CEO seat!

Landing didn't improve the outlook. The gate wasn't ready so we sat on a runway. Then a passenger got up to the toilet so we couldn't move. All of which made for a very nervous connection time having to go thru security which went thru everything of everybody. Then they insisted on checking my luggage.

Frankfurt is NOT the best defender of German efficiency. We taxi long enough to feel like we left the country. We have stairs after deplaning. The walk from one gate to another was very long even for me. It also took a monorail ride. The bus to the next plane was packed like sardines then they let us off in heavy rain and took my soaked bag to sit on the Tarmac awhile longer. We climbed stairs with wet feet due to the puddles. There was no cover. Once inside the plane it became clear that we were

boarding from the back and boarding from the front and meeting in the middle with an impossibility to pass. All the while, dripping wet.

All endured patiently on a very tired body with an hour or so of sleep. Nicely I should have a hotel car waiting for me. And hopefully my luggage too.

I like travel? Mostly.

Day 3 - first full day in Split on the Dalmatian coast - Following my couple hours walk yesterday, I have decided that this is about the most foreign place I have been for a long time. I can't understand them and get no clue in reading signs.

These couple pictures obviously aren't from MY camera! Helicopter views:



Sent the following to some folks yesterday along with a video from palace center: The center of Split is this multi block roman emperors quarters. It was built as a summer home around the year AD305. Now it is filled full of tiny little shops, some ritzy and some super simple. Just on the other side of it from my hotel is a multi-mile long Mediterranean type frontage (Adriatic sea) lined with shops and palm trees. Behind are huge cliffs and mountains. Getting here was another story and now that I'm here I have spent as much time napping as I have a walking so the story will continue another day. End

Even the five-star hotel breakfast will take some getting used to. It has to be good that it is a lot of salads and fish and fruits. The instant coffee packets in the room are called a 3 for 1 and there is an alternate 2 for 1, and the package is complete with sugars and milk with the coffee.



Some of the simple little shops remind me of early days in Taiwan. The seaside promenade reminds me of Nice. What isn't foreign are the huge signs that say "fast food" as these little stalls are all over the place. The language seems very strange to me and then to have the "fast food" thrown into the equation is disconcerting. Grocery shopping was more of a challenge than I have encountered.

The old town is mainly the Diocletian's Palace. I did Rick Steves' self-guided walking tour today. It was the emperor's retirement palace and it does sit right on the harbor. It was a villa plus a fortified wall town. There are a few museums inside and I did the old town Split museum and also the fine arts Museum just outside the walls. Both were in old but renovated houses of historical significance. Neither were worthy of the trip but interesting. I had meant to climb up the tower that is attached to

the cathedral (converted from the emperor's mausoleum), but at 93° I was wilting as it was. Most all of the town was built with the local white marble and that is the same marble as allegedly used for our White House. It shows its wear which is charming.

Just as interesting is that it might look familiar to you if you watch "game of thrones". It is now home to over 3000 residents within the 8 acre walled space with about 200 buildings. I don't know the program "game of thrones" but I envision today as we were being bombarded by all the cruise ship tourists that it must bear some similarity. There were two huge ships out in the harbor with their tender-boats coming in and out and their passengers just swarming in and around all the little souvenir shops and even more at the ice cream kiosks. Ugh.

The weather isn't much familiar either as I've not had 93 degrees for some time. I poured sweat my first day. I ducked into any shops for the a/c but there were not many. Along the promenade I could find no place with air-conditioning but some of the outdoor seating had water misting for cooling. It is possible that they are not accustomed to this much heat.

Jet lag is more than I usually expect, but remembering that I had barely catch up time since being on the west coast, thus I've got 9 hours to deal with. I call it 4 o'clock syndrome. It might be psychological but it feels alive and well. 4pm and I die on the pillow. 4am and I never slept again.

My hotel is the only five-star in the city. It looks pretty simple to begin with until I realized the quality. It is high-tech with buttons for requesting maid, for do not disturb, and timers and small night lights on all switches. The black marble, lots of black glass and mirrors, is almost stark. It is however about a 20 minute walk from old town and seems to host a lot of tour buses. I saw that VBT is in this hotel and Backroads is down the road a bit.

Trekking poles? - I wanted to hand carry luggage but trekking poles are not allowed through security. The silliness of it is that I had to check my luggage on the second leg anyway. I say silly because I had to buy a pair of expensive trekking poles today. I looked all over and finally received an email from the upcoming hiking leaders telling me of the only little store where I might find them. I'd hoped one of them would loan or rent me at least one pole. But I have had a minor intermittent problem with one leg so I thought I'd better hedge my bet and pay up.

And on that I must quit. Tomorrow we are picked up for the start of a six day trip including some islands and ending in Dubrovnik where I'll stay on a few days.

Life is good. If I don't melt.

Day 4 from Split to Brac - Do you know that the Croatian coast, thought of as the Mediterranean but called the Dalmatian coast, has 1250 islands? I'm on one of them. Visited another one today. On the way to Trogir we toured the Saline amphitheater that predated from Roman times. It's a neat story about a priest who didn't get to become a bishop and instead he became an archaeologist, bought up land and digging on it and if he found nothing he just turned the land back and asked where his money back.

Trogir, another UNESCO site, is an island of only 150 meters in size but looks like it attracts huge numbers of tourists. It is Sinking like Venice sinks. Was Greek then roman and now it is Tourist. A highlight was an Au Capella private performance in one of many churches. Maybe I will send my video. Maybe I will eventually play the CD I bought. Ha ha. Can you tell that I was impressed?

To get there we drive through a most fertile valley in part because it is protected by the mountains, and in part because it has to protected bay of split on the other side. It is the Homeland of Zinfandel

grapes. Famous black wines. There are peaches, Vegas, and now grapes. In between, there are swamplands for birds R&R.

Back to Split with a tour of the Palace which is a UNESCO of highest category. The catacombs were new to me. Cool in many ways. It's still hot out. The mausoleum now probably the oldest cathedral in world and the baptistery had some first ever sculpture of a king. White clear marble.

Lunch of two courses, starting with a shrimp creamy risotto, then fresh fish, vegetable of the season spinach, and potato. Lots of, if not too much, wine but only after voluminous amounts of sparkling water as its horrible hot.

Tax evasion? - Seen on the streets are brochures that say "can I have the receipt please?" Like in the 70s when we lived in Belgium apparently Croatia is fighting me on the market. I believe this is what happens taxes become too high. Croatia calls it not the black market like Belgium but rather than shadow economy. We are seeing more and more at it in The U.S.

Ferry ride of about 50 minutes at 4:30 to Brac. Second largest island. 40x15 miles. Someone fell asleep on the ferry and after we all disembarked and were boarding the bus, he had to go be found.

Older folks. Ugh. May as well go with elder hostel aka roads scholars. Guides say they are surprised too. (I'm surely NOT one of them. . . .)



Dinner in a cistern. Really. There's no water so they collected rainwater in the old days. Now - They have restaurants and cafes and then they have Cornavas- a restaurant with all made by family. Watched them make our seafood dinner in a huge oven. Hot coals. Big calamari cones and vegetables. Washed down with local wines. One was Malvaxija intrska - a red. Who can pronounce that? Dangerous since we had started with tastes of grappa. Damn dinner went to 10:30pm. Then we got lost walking home. So, 7-9 breakfast and 9 depart is tough.

It might be clear that I am making notes as I go along and it's a good thing because there's no time in between hiking and dinner. Then getting in from dinner at 10:45 PM is the pits so I may give up dinner tonight.

Day 5 in Brac - the island home of Ivana our guide. - Our second guide is Jaka (Yaka) a Slovenian. Maybe I'll see him again. Ivana is a very lovely full bodied gregarious 45 year old. Jaka is a handsome healthy dark haired beauty himself at age 35. He is a soft spoken newbie guide and she is a well-educated senior guide. Both, as most Croats I've heard, speak excellent English with next to no accent. This is curious to me because the Cyrillic alphabet is impossible to read.

Breakfast still a bit of challenge but not all those vegetables today which presumably were at our hotel for the bus load of Japanese.

I must have brought the wrong immersion heater for coffee making (110v vs 220v.) I blew it out but didn't blow out the hotel's power at least. One of the maids has now help me out by finding an electric tea kettle for tomorrow. I am more than fond of my coffee as soon as I wake up – it is a necessity.

Today: Walked along the emerald Mediterranean coast then up and up a steep road thru olive groves to a tiny village for lunch. There were museums on the way; olive oil, history of Brac, and an orchard where we ate our way through. And in most places we got a taste or more of grappa. (Siri hears that word as garbage and some people agreed. But like the French eau de vie, I like it.)

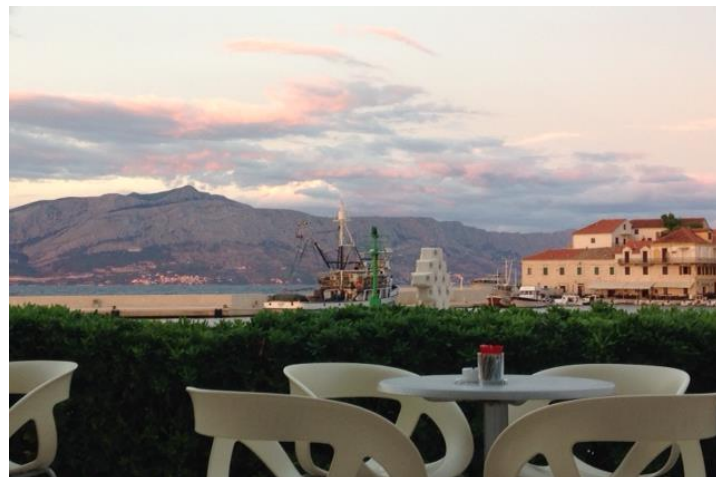
Lunch was at an all home grown place. Our guides claim that the owner only cooks for country walker groups. Sardines with olive oil and a fresh tuna pate spread were stars. Then came the gnocchi with choice of sauces along with house made red wine. Oh, the usual grappa selection beforehand. Fresh fruits of the season for desserts included two types of grapes and plums.

Most chose to resume the walk in the afternoon. It was a bit of climb but with views of the waters and land masses for much of the hike. It was however over big loose stones which are very common here.

In fact, this is probably noted not only for the Whitestone of the Emperors Palace as well as the White House but also as having huge amounts of stone that are piled up in heaps and in walls. In order to plant their vineyards and their olive trees they are required to clear the rocks.

Tourism, interesting, is quite new to even Split and it has only been about five years that they have had the tourist and the numbers grow. It seems like there would be no reason this would not be an even better Riviera. And even better Cinque Terra. And even better Amalfi Coast. Time will tell but I feel very grateful to be seeing it now and seeing it with a resident who is also a historian and outdoor fanatic.

I sent around a video of the beautiful sunset. I was glad to have given up dinner so that I could walk the town. I say I went to church and I went to school then I went to the hilltop all of which required a lot of walking along the coast. Walking their steep back streets in looking at people's homes and backyards and schoolchildren is what I enjoy.



And on that and for now I will say good night and admit that whatever frustration I had to get here it was all well worth it.

Day 6 Brac to Hvar - Maybe we are transferring islands today via a James Bond type motor boat for a short trip, and then later a longer one by a private catamaran. Yet a huge storm has come up and the waves are now breaking over the wall at the hotel making those boat rides either a challenge or nonexistent. This is why we have good tour leaders who are local and have a lot of options.

The first plan worked. A long curvy bus ride and then a walk to monastery. Tough big wiggly rocks. Very slippery and steep.

This monastery was built way up a hill, out an initial cave, and really hanging cliff-side; closed in the 60s and donated by private owners to the state and now a museum. Ivana knew the caretaker well and she gave us the tour which included a school/classroom where we became the students. I would fail as Croats have 30 odd letters. Odd language for us.

Tedious walk down and down and more down 1600 feet to a bay where a boat picked us up much to my distress but it all worked. Boat! I whispered to the one young guide my trepidation getting in the boat off the hillside rocks. He helped.

Damn another ride up a hill to lunch but not til 2pm. I carry food for this reason but had two meals pre this lunch marathon.

Higher yet drive to the highest peak on the island for a panorama. It should have been worth the ride but the view was 10 minutes and the ride over a very curvy road was hugely more. Yet it did also give us a UNESCO site overlook that later we would drive thru it so the perspective of was important. It's apparently an old growth of olive trees and vineyards virtually unchanged over the centuries since the Greeks lived there. I must read more.



As happens in micro-climates, the weather changed and to the better so that the catamaran became available. So more curvy roads into the town of Bol and a walk around town before loading into the catamaran for a ten minute ride that turned into more like 25 followed by a thirty minute bus ride to the hotel. Good thing it's a "free" night since we aren't to hotel until 7:30pm. But we are in Hvar!

A very sweet little village filled full of beautiful young people and it's probably something akin to Portofino on steroids. There are yachts and restaurants and seaside walkways and designer specialty shops and views and it is most enchanting. My room over looks all this where I had a good long evening walk. I must tell you more about this town but it will have to be later.

Pic is the monastery then the view from the top. One is Hvar pic from internet – obviously as it's a helicopter shot.



And when I am not coming upon a midnight bedtime, I should tell the lost wallet story.

Day 7 - In Hvar - Wonderful little village. A wannabe or soon-to-be Bellagio? Certainly a younger but bigger Portofino.

Our day started by going up a multitude steps to the fortress high on the hill. It overlooked the bay, islands, the town, and the famous white marbled old town square. We could see our hotel sitting on the water and then a bit farther away on the water we can see the remnants of the communist hotel too. It looked it.

The fortress included a Museum of old shipwreck items. Many were lost by tourists or bounty hunters so now when found they simply net them for protection until they can afford to properly excavate them for museums.

There is a definite Venetian influence here as they owned the lands and built part of the town. It includes a theater that was the first one for public use ever. Maybe that is one of the reasons that we have the convents and monasteries. We went to a convent where they make detailed lace like the Belgians are noted for but it apparently came from Venice.



Back to the museum. Some names of boat parts show the countries connection. That the world was a bit flatter than we realize in 14th and 15th centuries.

After the fortress tour another damned Bus ride to other side of island. Up and over and still curvy. Like Majorca. Our ride and our walk took us thru abandoned villages that were recently re-habituated. More rocky terrain. There were rows and rows of rocks and I believe this is the area that is UNESCO

protected because the Greeks built it and it remains as original. The olive trees, vineyards, and their famous lavender production is no longer feasible because machinery cannot get between the rock walls.

Lunch was seaside with seafood of course and washed down with gross amounts of wine. I don't know why we don't all have alcohol poisoning. I ate a whole fish called the Dorado.



Mr. Lost Boots, who fell asleep on the ferry, is also Mr. Found Wallet (he left wallet with money and passport on the airport shuttle and it was later found intact!). He then became Mr. Speedo by swimming everywhere he went and even keeping the Speedo on during lunches so he could swim again. Mr. Two Lunches? He ordered at one end of the table, went for a swim, re-sat himself at the other end of the table and apparently he forgot that he had ordered his meal at the other end of the table also. So he got still another meal. We worked at eating his second platter of moules, langoustine and clams.

I think it would be OK if Mr. Speedo saw this. I had intended to remove it before publishing because he totally redeemed himself. But for two reasons I leave it in – as much because we started kidding him about being the Lost Professor and he quite surely knew that we all loved him. And -- he knows what sounds like just the right medical college for Marie, where his daughter went and is still associated with, and his daughter is a college counsellor. Even better, this school has plenty of money and if accepted they are “need blind.” Still another upside is that they specialize in neuroscience which is the field Marie is looking forward to. So Mr. Everything turned out to be my friend for lots of reasons. His wife was amazing: she would just roll her eyes and let him go.

Well, after our great extravaganza meal we went hiking another 2 1/2 to 3 hours back to the hotel. Some returned via bus.

My marathon friends would find my 6 to 9 miles a wimpy day but I like to challenge them to try all the rocky steps and hill climbs and spend as many hours on their feet as a marathon doing so. Maybe they do understand because not many of them have taken me up on that challenge.

Day 8 - Hvar to Korcula - Oh how I hate to leave Hvar. We fortunately have the morning left to hike in the area then an hour or two before the catamaran to our next destination. I don't know how much there would be to do in this town other than look at the scenery and eat and a little bit of hiking, but it sure is special. It however would not be easy to get to as it would take a ferry from Split. As I saw folks getting off the ferry manhandling bags, I wondered what it'd be like to fly all night to Frankfurt, connect to split a few hours later, take the rather long single roadway from split airport to the docks, then a long ferry ride. I'd have to do a resting layover.

But once you're here! - There is a travel writer claiming that Hvar is one of the 10 best islands in the world. It being an island takes the Amalfi coast and Cinque Terra out of the mix.

Ivana, the Tour Guide, claims Korcula is her favorite town. It is a small walled city and our hotel is said to be much simpler. Before making the trip there and after our hike we will have an afternoon of wine tasting which will surely make everything seem wonderful.

Again, I wonder how it is that we don't have alcohol poisoning. The hotel in Hvar has not only the most generous breakfast but also the most surprising in that they not only offers champagne but various types of grappa for breakfast. The offerings are extensive though other than the variety and lushness, it is the alcohol for breakfast that amuses us. Ivana says her mother has some grappa every day for breakfast and mother has already made it to what she thinks is the ripe old age of 76. Ha ha.

Our last dinner in Hvar was a selection of tapas at a most unique restaurant way up a bunch of steps in a little alley. Their brochure says "no pizza. No rice. No spaghetti. No Coca-Cola." It has been family run forever and of course they make their own wine. The dishes are allegedly local specialties from old ancient recipes. How would I know if that were true or not but we all enjoyed it immensely.



The language. Or reading menus. Here is a sample and I ask you "what would you order?"

Our morning hike was again along the coast but with huge cliffs. And too much sun. Wine tour, tastings and small bits of food didn't prepare me for the long curvy bumpy ride back to Hvar and it took me most of the hour we had for shopping to recover. That's mostly ok as I don't shop anyway but the stomach being in the throat somehow made my legs near useless and thus I found a corner to go fetal position and cry. It didn't last long, for I managed to buy a bottle of herb grappa anyway but no I didn't consume.

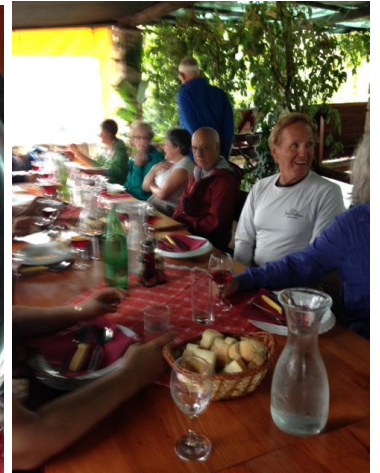


Croatian surprises include:

- I never saw a beggar. There are huge numbers of nice neat controlled kiosk sellers, but no beggars.
- How unpopulated it is.
- Everybody speaking good English and so kindly.
- It's called the Mediterranean. Actually it feels double so. Double amazing. But it's on the Adriatic Sea.
- Big cliffs right at seaside.

Day 8 and 9 into Kocula - Gads but this is a big archipelago! An hour ferry ride. A 42 km bus ride. And the hotel is crap - though I'm told it's the best around. The a/c was stuck at 26 degrees, it was small, and despite paying up a single supplement, I had a true European single room. You can guess.

Despite only having an hour to unpack and shower, I felt a need to go with the group for dinner. And what an extravaganza of dinner and entertainment! Included our guide singing with the band. She called it our UPS: Unexpected Pleasant Surprise. Here is a picture of her. (Sorry that the pictures might shuffle out of order.)



Ivana the guide's good friend and surrogate family has a local restaurant. Frank makes all his food makings, wine, olive oil, etc. This is sounding like the norm. Of course we had grappa first, two kinds of cheese and his ham and olives next, followed by a salad so different because of the freshness.

Cute: Elderly Frank the café owner offered me his open garage with internet connection and then proceeded to meet Tom and show him around the wine making facilities. Isn't FaceTime great! Frank explained how the tax man requires all restaurants to have internet.

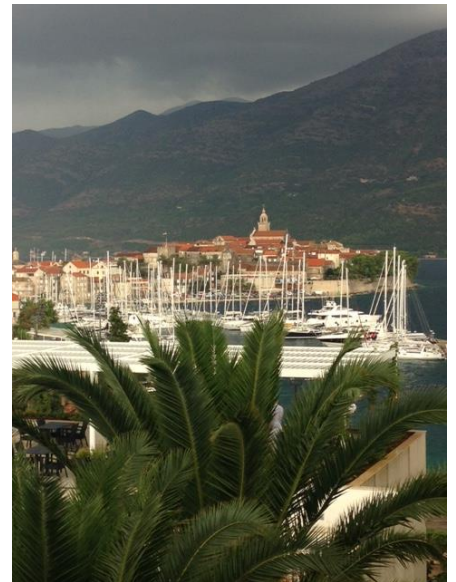
It was a late evening with me begging a taxi at around 10:30 but their claiming we'd leave soon. Then a group went to the bar even after returning to the hotel. When invited you can guess what I told them.

The hotel should redeem itself with the view out my window and with the islands of buffet lush breakfast. Yet I'm unforgiving for no a/c. I'll add a picture now in case the sun doesn't come. That is Old Town. And the land you see is a long peninsula sticking out from Croatia itself but might soon be an island.

The monsoon type rains came so cooler temps should prevail. They let up and lightning calmed by departure time so I went on. I am ready and ok for rain but I don't foolishly go out looking for a drenching.

Frank walked us thru a number of little village enclaves with descriptions of his families long term stone cutting and building. Rains came and went and once we found shelter in a wine cave type dwelling. So it was then back to lunch with Frank again. His outdoor picnic table type facilities are fortunately under cover as heavy rain continued.

What to eat? - Fish soup, vegetable platter of cabbage, potato then slices of eggplant around edge, followed by whole sea bass, then a dessert platter.



See the picture of the fish plate above. Obviously AF for After Fish. Dessert? It's not common and it's rarely sweet. We all loved the Figs stuffed with almond then dipped in chocolate.

Country walkers? Call us Country Eaters. Country strollers.

Afternoon - Ivana gave us a personal lecture on history. From her grandparents being lost in wars to her remembrances of Yugoslavia and Tito. To the Bosnian more recent atrocities. It was all revealing, emotional and a tear jerker yet not to be missed. By the way, Frank went to New Zealand for a few years during the conflict. I now realize many went to South America too.

Tito a dictator? Yes but a nice one. When Tito died in 1980, all presidents of the world came to pay their respects. The first time that had happened.

I think it's now time for another meal. I'm starting to look like my mother and need to stay home longer to recover my proper weight. There is an extra five pounds hanging around here

PS the Pope is featured on their TV speaking to Congress. Whatever happened to separation of church and state? Yet maybe our politicians can use a bit more religion.

Day 10 and 11 - Korcula to and in Dubrovnik - Leaving our third old town experience where no cars are allowed. These towns have been so much like a Disneyland.

We might have moss growing on us by now. The room was wet. I was wet. It has poured like monsoons forcing the guides to change course in Korcula to our very wet walking tour of villages. Frank, the restaurant owner, was a lovely replacement as he had so much history.

Evening took us to old town and the rain mostly took pity on us though on way home an umbrella wasn't enough. We got drenched. It is not easy packing wet clothing.

Dinner. Do I care if I ever see food again? By main course I was stunned to even see it coming. I thought we were done - plus it was already 10pm so some of us left to walk back in the dark and rather heavy rain. What did we eat? Drinking first to include some new grappa selections. I have a bottle of herb grappa for my room and it is probably too much for even me to finish. To add to my alcohol poisoning. Black ink squid risotto plus another kind. Fried zucchini flowers. Little sardines and a herring. Tomatoes. More. I'm maybe trying to NOT remember. Some folks love all the eating and I would say that about half of us did not.

Host memento gifts - We were gifted with a good sized book of Dalmatia including a needed pull out map.

Big transport day with first a small private boat reminding me of Venice then a hike of 2-3 hours for a high panorama overlook across the waters to Korcula. Another half hour downhill - reminding us that down goes faster - to a little village for lunch on our own. And finally drying off.

Damn but more transport this time by mini bus and still more curvy roads. Can you imagine but half hour of icky roads and then they ate oysters? We went to an area which is noted for an unusual and rare oyster where they are farmed.

On the way, via a small town called Ston that is noted for the longest wall in Europe like the China wall. Yes like the China Wall you can walk it and yes it was for protecting, and in this case protecting the very valuable salt flats. It's hard to imagine but you might remember in history that salt was like gold.

Now to the really good stuff - We entered Dubrovnik and it truly is a Disneyland. It is not just a UNESCO site. It is well restored and absolutely beautiful. Enchanting. Amazing.

The only thing I could find wrong with that, as did everyone on our group and our tour guides, are all the cruise ship people. The joke is that they land, they are transported in, they spend one or two hours, and say they saw Dubrovnik all the while simply jamming up the spaces in buying from the multitude of T-shirt shops with Chinese merchandise. The town is infested with them but I now know that they go back to their cruise ships and then the town gets very nice by 3 PM. I am reminded that some folks like cruise ships because they CAN see a lot. I counter that there's a better way.

More good stuff - The hotel Grand Villa Argentina was wonderful. After our last simple place it probably looked even better. The room is lovely and comfortable and five-star appointed. It looks out over the water, the island, and extensive gardens. From the windows in my corner room (I had arranged an upgrade) I watched a bride and groom being photographed and looked over onto the old town. Later I watched the sunset over old town.



We would settle in and eventually go touring in old town with its evening setting of romantic lights. The meal was again typical country walkers that being a lot of alcohol and many courses. Some of us left early. Some were glad to have the gourmand setting in one of the best restaurants in town called Proto.

Me? I was glad to crawl in bed before midnight and turn my lights off before 1 AM since we were getting up before 7 AM. Would I have done it without knowing I had a free afternoon the next day? I'm not so sure that the theme "you can sleep when you're dead" qualifies when you are near dead.

Next up? - A review of Saturday, the last day of the official tour. But for now I am off to plan Sunday to Montenegro.

Day 12 - Saturday - the last tour day in Dubrovnik - I will have four nights in the Grand Villa Argentina and after only one night I have already decided that I am short a day or two for those things I feel I must see. My tour group brought us here for the first night and the next day, which is Saturday, Ivana the guide arranged for a 3 1/2 hour walking tour of the old town which is about a 10 minute walk away from the hotel. Downhill.

While I particularly loved the island of Hvar, I see now that Dubrovnik is truly a living fairytale and as charming as I had been promised, if not more so. Some call it the Pearl of the Adriatic and some refer to it as their Riviera. It really has opened well for tourism in the last five years and I can see where it has a lot of growth potential. Remember that they suffered a serious war in the 1990s and a lot of damage needed to be repaired. It reminds me at Disneyland or a fairytale is made all the more so by the walking tours of "game of thrones" which has periodically a lot of filming done in old town.



I will add an Internet panorama aerial view picture to give you an idea of this walled city with red roofs. Inside might remind you of Venice and that is because the Venetians were in Croatia for some time.

History - In the fourth century BC the Greeks settled here and then came the Romans the first century A.D. In the 1200s the Crusaders came through. Best of all for us tourist was the late 1600s when they were under the niche in control and that lasted until the 1800s when Napoleon and asked them. It sounds like most people have fond memories of the mid-1900s when Tito was in power. But he died in 1980 and by 1991 nothing was held together and civil war erupted. I don't think they like the term civil war however as they would say it was strictly a war for their independence. Dubrovnik was actually under siege for a full nine months.

Hotel - I am always happier with a place if my accommodations are comfortable, well appointed, and in a nice setting. This hotel has it all and fortunately I upgraded to a corner room with a view of the walled city as well as the adjoining island and gardens. The price reflected all that and more. It is a 5-star. I might have gotten my monies worth at the lush breakfast buffets. Smile.

I'll add an internet aerial view of the hotel gardens too. Yes - the waters are Mediterranean blue.



Lunch was on the other side of the old town on a nice terrace in a top rated restaurant with a Dubrovnik style pizza. It kept me thirsty all afternoon and evening and thus up much of the night making pit stops. Not good since I was to be up at 5:45am.

Public toilets? - The morning tour challenged both my attention span but no more than my bladder was challenged. All of us went seeking a toilet after our 3 1/2 hours touring and then goodbyes. I felt really smart when I saw the 7 Kona charge for the toilet to take a table at a lovely garden restaurant, order a 25 Kona wine, and get free Internet, with a toilet included.

Back alleys - The cruise ships were still in town so my method is often times to look for the quietest and emptiest back alleys streets and go there. I walked pretty much all of the perimeter of the town and found laundry



hanging out, schoolchildren playing, families arguing, and the smells of local homemade meals.

Cable car to panoramic views and museum of war was pretty tempting but I spent my day walking the back streets instead.

I will add a picture of an illuminated manuscript - a big giant size choir book from one of the monasteries. I've learned about these from my friend Ellen who would travel the world to see them.



And then my last picture is goodnight sunset from my balcony.

Day 13 - Sunday early morning to Montenegro for a long day trip - Thirty - forty minutes bus to border crossing. It's called the Carina and/or Douane. I was the only non-EU passport holder out of nine of us. Had to show passport to get out of Croatia then to get into Montenegro. I have a brand new passport with two stamps now. 9:10am

Big change in terrain - Dramatically high green mountains rising straight up from the water. Quite different from all the Rocky terrain we saw in Croatia and sure brought oohs and aahs from us. Higher than I can remember seeing.

Big change in economies - Reminded me of going from Austria or France into Italy. Disadvantaged to the point of feeling a black cloud at the border. Montenegro uses Euros but not because they are in euro zone. They had used German marks so had no currency of their own so they now use euros like people do. Not like governments do.

Never heard anything local about the migrants and Croatia got creamed. I expected complaints but maybe the Pope silenced some. I hope it helps stop that silly US talk about 11 million migrants not being welcome. In Turkey a couple years ago they'd bragged about taking in over 1 million. Now it's 2 million and I'm doubtful they are given much credit.

Learned many new stories on the tour. The Bosnian borders in the middle of Croatia on the coast being a weird one. Seems Bosnia won a chunk of land seaside so Croatia wants to build a bridge bypass. By the time they can get it done there will be no EU borders anyway.

Ferry ride across one of many bays only taking 10 minutes. 9:45am. Seemed to be free ferry crossings as I can't imagine they use EZ PASS. We would come home another route.

Walked thru new Porto of Montenegro with chance to eat and shop. I used all my time to walk and explore. The elegant Regents Hotel exclusive as were many huge yachts. We'd seem allegedly the world's largest yacht out in the bay but I missed name and picture. It was said to be owned by a Russian but now I read that someone is overtaking that honor by building still a larger yacht. It is too big to get into the fiords of Montenegro. I'll add couple pics from ferry and then at this new yacht port.



Big mixture of rich and poor. Who is building these Monte Carlo type yacht ports? Couldn't they share some of the wealth? Large number of Russians used to vacation in area but world politics hurt the area badly last two years. Putin wants them to vacation in the Crimea.

We passed by many beaches but one was 12 km long famous beach with festivals and big names appearing such as Madonna. On the way into Budva.

Town of Budva - Built up with casinos and hotels surrounding a number of perfect beaches backed by rocky cliffs. And curvy little roads. Ugh. Plenty of fancy looking resettlement looking areas. Plus an exclusive and pricey island fully built up and maybe called Stefan. Need to look it up as we drove up and out of our way to see it.



Ahh - just saw on Wikipedia what I'd missed. A 15th century preserved village now modernized in inside by Aman Group. Interesting. Ritzly. Visited by the wealthy. Stefans and here is my picture.

Walked Budva Old Town ramparts. Rather touristy but what views. Mediterranean water everywhere on one side interspersed with green but Rocky islands. Straight up huge cliffs on other

side. See the picture of one of the tours which appears to be a new fad in the area. It is a semi submarine tour.

This area can surely be competition to the Riviera. One day. There's no highway yet from Split to Dubrovnik. They are working on it but still it's a wee road seaside through villages. There are not big airports and can't imagine how they can build any on cliff tops. Building will have to go UP soon.

Road signs - I'm used to European road signs but Wild Boar caution signs? That is new.

Cruise ships - Always the subject of tour guides and locals. It has to be the absolutely worst way to see a country. Where they drop tourists is generally in undesirable locations at the ugliest of times since it's when all other ships dock. We've known for many years that if someone doesn't like Venice you can bet they saw it via cruise ship. Tougher than the bus "flyover" too and those I generally disregard as having seen little more than roadways. I need to remember that cruising is very popular so a great number of folks think they DO get something out of it. I'd think there's a better way.

Map of Kotor a walled city on a fiord added. I'm out of space on this missive and tired so the best will wait. Or look it up!

Back in Dubrovnik around 7:30pm to get ready for a Monday day trip thru local and different islands.

Fun! Different - so many are seen rolling their own cigarettes.

Day 14 - Monday to Elaphite islands - I never wrote of Kotor. Yesterday at the end of the day I ran out of email space and my body ran out of energy. Kotor Bay in Montenegro: Maybe the best of water, mountains, fiord and nature that I've ever seen. A Croatian or Montenegrin (so?) would never be impressed with Hawaii.

Dubrovnik might be best for old atmosphere, best preserved, and best history, and Hvar best for atmosphere which had Sweetness and is rich and comfortable. The land of those who love Monte Carlo but not the growth or crowds.

Today is Monday. I leave Tuesday. I booked another full day trip for my last day. I'd like to have had another day to poke thru back streets and neighborhoods in Dubrovnik and look closer at palaces and museums I hurried through on Saturday. Go up to the top of the mountain on foot or cable car. Maybe another full day for the nearby town of Cavtat where it's older than Dubrovnik and where art is the highlight. The famous sculpture Ivan Mestrovic built a mausoleum there for the Racic family that qualified as a top rated sight and there is also the portraiture Vlahos bukovsc had a home now a museum there.

Oops. When I woke up I could hear the winds and vowed to NOT go on white capped water. The bus pick up guide said it was fine and after a long drive to the ship area, the boat captain insisted the boat would be stable too. I was loaded with a bunch of French folks, a language familiar enough that I had the opportunity of getting partial double chance to hear the commentary.

The loading area of multiple-multiple story cruise ships again made me understand how gross it all is. They dock in an ugly area and then create ugly masses/swarms of tourists that the locals hate. I hear how they spend little money but consume resources and see little of the real local life. Yet it's all just



in the level of desire to see in-depth as I too had mostly a flyover despite living in the center of town for four days. Cruisers get to say "oh, I saw that country" and they don't need to pack up suitcases but once.

The biggest ship picture is Cunard's Queen Victoria. The smaller ship is a common public ferry crossing boat. The bridge is obviously new and a quite nice artistic design.



My goodness but how ugly I am. The second load of tourists to load my tour boat were so obviously American and looked much different from the French. I stayed on the bottom deck with the French.

The weather - It has been next to perfect from low 60s to mid-70s. Small bit of sprinkle on the Montenegro tour and only part of two days hiking with heavy downpours. On the boat to the islands we all shivered. Thank heavens I had a hooded jacket and Buff.

Many islands relied on rainfall and cisterns for water for it was only recently that water was piped from the mainland. So they produced and drank wine.

Polite and considerate - Croatians seemingly abide by time. We were never late or left standing. The tour company even called the night before to say they'd be about ten minutes late. That seems to put the tourists on notice and they too are never late. Quite the opposite from tours in the U.S. Equally there is never trash on the streets despite there being few trash cans.

My hotel currently has a group of Japanese residing and they too have been quiet and polite. Sometimes we think of the Asians as having taken over the old role of "ugly Americans" yet maybe that's the lower class and newly rich Chinese. They can be a problem.

Our first island stop was Sipan. It's the larger island of the chain but just six square miles. A bit of guided tour then a hike up to a church that was really a fortress with raw stone walls. Ugly. Some climbed the 90 steps to the top. I climbed the hill to up above it and could see both sides of the sea.

Followed by a lunch of whole fish, vegetables and salad but not until we were offered the requisite grappa, then all the wine you could drink. I'd met a mother and daughter on the trail then found them staked out at my table later. Daughter a PhD working in London and the mother from Connecticut but of the type who has a second home in Hilton Head. Daughter trying to see it all in fast weekend trips. I've been there.

I tipsied off the boat with all my grappa and wine sloshing about onto the busier island of Lopud but found I was islanded out. Overload. They were looking alike with same boats, same made in China souvenirs and same type of tourists. I must be getting ready to go home.

Needing a hug. Tired of tourists who count countries.

A good thing about this tour is getting a handle on just what 1,000 plus islands means. They blend into each other looking like fiords. They are large and small. They are uninhabited or heavily populated. Or they were quarantine stations from ancient days and now turned into night clubs or resorts. They are cheap or they are expensive with the difference often pointed out. Lopud island has one of the few sandy beaches. Many have walls and a monastery. (Old days really needed so many priests?). All have more boats then you can count.

But the rich and smart surely go to Hvar!

On the island - is this a new fad or stolen bottoms? France had topless beaches. Does Croatia have bottomless? It's pretty cool temp wise for either.



There are more ways than you can count to get to the islands. See a couple of choices? Our boat isn't the fast one nor the pirate ship.



It was suggested that we walk to the end of the island to an outlook. There was nothing there including no toilet so I return to civilization and more wine. And a lack of space on email notes.

Day 14 continued - The islands are starting to all look alike.

I walked to the end of the second island today and found just what they said: more sea and more islands. And no toilet which seems common so I scurried back to civilization on tired tootsies. Lots of me is tired and ready for home.



Somehow canoes and monasteries don't seem to mix. Except here.



Vine covered patios and wine do. Next picture please. That's MY wine and the monastery across the bay.

There are cats everywhere and all look clean and healthy but much smaller than I'm used to. In the botanical garden I found a weird mix of white with a tiger tail. Also weird in that most all are so friendly as to rub up against your leg, purr, and continue to beg. This one was skittish.



Lopud Island is the main attraction of the Elaphite islands. It has the main beach. There's a luxury hotel and spa that I walked through and it's all new, white and lavender, and borders on tacky.

The more famous beach is sandy and hemmed in by forests. There are golf carts to take you the 30-45 minute 1.5 mile walk over scrubby pine to the other side. I didn't continue. It's said to have Bars and ritzy yachts. There is an abandoned old Grand Hotel on the way.

Return via boat - I feel like I cheated death. The return boat looked far too small and I reluctantly boarded it while being assured it would hold us all. Had we not been pulling away from the dock as I realized there were no life vests or life saver inner-tubes, and found six more boarding at the very last minute, I would have chosen to hire a water taxi on my own.

Ahhhh, too much undone in these travels. Now I have interest in seeing Ottoman influenced Mortar.

Country Walkers gave us a museum pass with too many free entries I missed though I did get through the cultural history museum, the palace, house of playwright Marin Drzic, and the art museum.

I've loved my hotel - and now love it more. When checking out this evening so I don't have to pre 5:30am, they booked a car to take me to the airport and then offered a box breakfast. I didn't need to snitch food this morning after all.

Foreign travel complications - Yesterday I got notice of a \$2321 American Airlines charge. Barcelona to JFK and other smaller but impossible charges. Tom took care of it but good thing I retain another card since my compromised one requires re issuance.

The highlight of the trip might be Kotor Bay yesterday. Here is an Internet aerial view. Too bad it's hard to get to, and accommodations and transport not quite ready for tourists. I can see the advantage of yachts but they can't be as big as the Russian with his "world's largest yacht" who is parked outside the fiords.

More pictures from the tour here:
Montenegro Excursion: <http://www.croatia-excursions.hr/en/excursion/montenegro-visit-the-best-11>

On my way home Tuesday. It's about time.



Itinerary

Wed Sep 16

7:35pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#50

Thu Sep 17

9:20am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

12:05pm Depart Frankfurt FRA via Croatia Airlines dba UA #7260

1:45pm Arrive Split SPU, Croatia

Hotel booked a car pick up at airport

Hotel: Atrium Hotel - 2 nights
Domovinskog rata 49 A, HR 0 21000 Split, Croatia Tele: 011 385 21 200 000
<http://www.hotel-atrium.hr/> - only 5-star in Split
Conf#67 826 and email in file; WiFi free in all rooms; yes coffee in room

From hotel website: *The building's marble and glass reflect the blue Mediterranean sky. It has grown on the foundations of ancient Split, just next to the location that the famous Roman emperor Diocletian chose as his summer house. The Aqueduct built in that era can be seen on the official exhibit site, at the underground premises of the hotel. From the hotel to the Diocletian's Palace and the vibrant and crowded waterfront is a fifteen minute walk – we are that close to the epicentre of all the events in Split.*

Overview by www.CountryWalkers.com - The southeastern tip of Croatia is one of Western Europe's best-kept secrets: a lush region of coves, forested islands, and its crowning jewel, the walled city of Dubrovnik. More than 1,000 unspoiled islands make up this archipelago along the Dalmatian Coast, and the region offers an astounding array of natural and historic wonders, from the grandeur that was Rome in Diocletian's palace in Split, to the rich Renaissance architecture of Hvar. You experience the area as it should be explored, by boat and on foot, immersing yourself in a unique culture that draws on Greek, Roman, and Venetian influences. The riches of these former empires unfold as you follow ancient trails through fertile countryside and along rocky coasts that lead to pristine beaches. You move in step with local life as you make your way through lively fishing villages, bustling markets, and charming hamlets preserved as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Your seaside accommodations combine comfortable amenities and gracious hospitality. Each day brings a new discovery, walking through dramatic landscapes adorned with fragrant rosemary and olive groves on Brač and Korčula. Each evening you are rewarded with authentic coastal fare accompanied by local wines.

Sat Sep 19 - DAY 1

9:30am Meet in lobby of Atrium Hotel

Atrium Hotel, Split, Croatia, Domovinskograta 49a Split, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 200 000

Walking tour of Trogir and Split; 2-3 hours, easy

You gather in the lobby of the meeting point hotel for a brief orientation followed by a visit to Trogir—a beautifully preserved walled town that boasts a profusion of Romanesque and Renaissance architectural styles, along with a magnificent cathedral. Afterward, you transfer to Split for a guided walking tour of Split's UNESCO-preserved old town. You are transported back to Roman times, strolling inside what used to be the retirement residence of the emperor Diocletian, past the Temple of Jupiter and into the mausoleum, now the town's cathedral. You then venture outside the city walls to Split's vibrant market and bustling bayside promenade, the Riva. After this tour, you enjoy a delicious lunch that may include grilled vegetables, octopus salad, and black risotto.

In the late afternoon, you board a public ferry for an hour transfer to Brač, the third-largest island of the archipelago, best known for its luminous white stone, from which both Diocletian's palace and the White House in Washington, D.C., were constructed. A short minibus transfer along the tranquil northern coast brings you to your hotel, a comfortable property with private beach overlooking the sleepy village of Postira. After getting settled, you gather for a welcome meeting and the first of many delicious dinners featuring the bounty of this distinctive coast.

Hotel Hotel Pastura, Brač – 1st of 2 nights
Postira, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 740 000 Email info@hotelpastura.hr
www. hotelpastura.hr Wireless Internet, hair dryers. No coffee

A comfortable hotel with swimming pool and private beach overlooking the sleepy village of Postira on Brač's tranquil northern coast.

Sun Sep 20 - DAY 2

Postira to Splitska and Skrip; 5 miles, easy to moderate, elevation gain of 800 ft

Today's walk takes you along a pine-clad northern coastal path from Postira to the fishing village of Splitska. A steady ascent winds through olive groves and cultivated terraces, culminating at the village of Skrip, the island's first settlement, founded by the Illyrians in 1000 BC. Remains of the original wall can still be seen around the citadel. You stop for a brief visit to the tower and Roman mausoleum, today a museum dedicated to the history of the island, before indulging in a memorable lunch of *pastičada*, a traditional Dalmatian specialty of slowly braised beef served with homemade *gnocchi*.

You return to the hotel in the afternoon with time to relax or swim before reuniting for a meal of local specialties at a traditional family-run *konoba* (restaurant).

Hotel Hotel Pastura, Brač – 2nd of 2 nights

Mon Sep 21 - DAY 3

Blaca Monastery and boat transfer to Zlatni Rat; Gazul and Vidova Gora; 3-5 miles, easy to moderate, elevation loss of 1400 ft

After a breakfast of local figs, homemade bread, cheese, and *prsut* (Dalmatian smoked ham), you set out to explore some of the island's finest attractions. After a 45-minute transfer by minibus, you reach the trailhead that leads to the 16th-century Pustinja Blaca, originally a hermitage founded in 1551 by Glagolitic priests during the Ottoman advance. A rocky dirt path descends gradually to the monastery, where we stop for a visit before continuing to a secluded cove. Here a short transfer by private boat brings you to the famous Zlatni Rat, or "Golden Cape." Afterward you proceed to a former shepherd's hamlet for a traditional *peka* lunch (meat and vegetable stew simmered slowly over hot coals under a dome-shaped lid).

The afternoon presents the option to continue either on foot or by minibus to Vidova Gora, the highest point on the island, for a panoramic view over the islands you will explore during the course of the journey.

Later today, you board a catamaran for a short transfer to the chic island of Hvar, famous for its lavender production. After checking into your comfortable seaside hotel, the evening is yours to stroll the promenade and admire Hvar town's main historical buildings, including the old theater—the first in Europe to be open to the public. For dinner you are free to choose from among the many restaurants and cafés, with recommendations from your guides and hotel staff.

Hotel Hotel Adriana, Hvar – 1st of 2 nights
Hvar, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 750 200 Email adriana@suncanihar.com
www.suncanihar.com/Adriana-hvar-spa-hotel.html
Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

Croatia's first and only member of The Leading Small Hotels of the World. A boutique hotel overlooking the marina in the center of Hvar town. The property features a saltwater swimming pool and spa.

Tue Sep 22 - DAY 4

Velo Grablje to Milna; 3-4 miles, easy to moderate. Milna to Hvar; 5-6 miles, easy to moderate, elevation loss of 600 ft

Relax over a leisurely breakfast before departing for a short walk to Spanjol Fortress, or citadel, for a bird's-eye view over the picturesque harbor and the nearby Pakleni islets. A short minibus transfer takes you inland to the village of Velo Grablje and the trailhead. The rocky path winds past an abandoned village and small olive grove before reaching the peaceful cove of Milna, where you may opt for a swim in the turquoise sea. You enjoy lunch at a seaside café before returning to Hvar either on foot or by minibus. Some guests may wish to indulge in a spa treatment, or simply unwind at the hotel, while others may prefer to shop or explore prior to dinner at one of our favorite family-run restaurants.

Hotel Hotel Adriana, Hvar – 2nd of 2 nights

Wed Sep 23 - DAY 5

Hvar's southern coast: Sveta Nedjelja and Sveti Nikola; 4.3 miles, easy to moderate

After a buffet breakfast of fresh fruits, cereals, pastries, and eggs, you embark on a scenic island excursion. Today's exploration takes you east along Hvar's southern coast through the wilderness of vineyards and lavender fields for which the island is famous. Your destination is the tiny coastal settlement of Sveta Nedjelja, situated below the island's highest peak, Sveti Nikola, which towers over the sea at 1,800 feet. A cluster of stone houses comprises the original village, situated on a rocky outcropping below a cave with remains of an Augustinian monastery, founded in the 15th century and used until 1787.

The village and beach are separated by a winding path which runs through a small pine wood. Sveta Nedjelja is a famous center for the production of the best types of Hvar red wine (known as plavac), which you may have an opportunity to sample before transferring back to Hvar town and indulging in a gelato. Late afternoon is spent relaxing on a scenic catamaran transfer to Korčula Island, the sixth-largest Adriatic island. There is time to refresh at your hotel, a seaside property and your base for the next two nights, before another memorable dinner.

Hotel Hotel Marko Polo, Korčula – 1st of 2 nights
Korcula, Croatia Tel 011 385 20 726 100 Email hotel-markopolo@htp-korcula.hr
<http://www.korculainfo.com/hotel-markopolo/>
Wireless Internet for a fee, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

A recently renovated seaside hotel with indoor and outdoor swimming pools, spa services, and panoramic restaurant.

Thu Sep 24 - DAY 6

Zrnovo Circuit; 3-5 miles, easy to moderate

After a copious buffet breakfast in the panoramic dining room, you set out to explore the wooded hills above Korčula, an island rich in vineyards and olive groves, and sprinkled with picturesque villages. Traditional culture has been preserved on this island, from religious festivals to folk music and dance to shipbuilding. A short transfer brings you to Zrnovo, where you explore the village and St. Martin's Church before continuing along a wide, rocky path dotted with cypress and aromatic Mediterranean maquis (low-lying vegetation).

Emerging from the wooded trail, beautiful views of the Peljesac Peninsula lie just across the channel. The trail descends to a natural harbor, where a special seafood lunch awaits, followed by time for swimming or relaxation.

This afternoon presents the opportunity to visit a local vineyard, for a tasting of the famous Posip Cara (white wine) before a guided visit to the UNESCO- preserved old town of Korčula—often referred to as a miniature Dubrovnik for its beautiful medieval buildings and stonework. Dinner is at a restaurant in the heart of town where a typical feast awaits, featuring prawns, calamari, and salad of sheep's cheese and olives, all topped off by an apple strudel dessert. An after- dinner stroll along the narrow streets of Korčula town provides perfect closure to the day.

Hotel Hotel Marko Polo, Korčula – 2nd of 2 nights

Fri Sep 25 - DAY 7

Peljesac Peninsula: Viganj to Orebic; 5 miles, easy to moderate, elevation gain and loss of 700 ft.
Mali Ston walls; 2 miles, easy

After breakfast, you bid farewell to Korčula to walk the hills along the Peljesac Peninsula, home to some of the best beaches in Southern Dalmatia, with wide, sandy coves bordered by groves of tamarisk and pine. After a short boat transfer to the tiny town of Viganj, you ascend a rocky trail for approximately 20 minutes. You are quickly graced with gorgeous views across the channel to Korčula before descending to Orebic, once an important maritime center and now home to a small maritime museum. You are free to pick up a light lunch at one of the local bakeries or pizzerias before transferring to Ston, whose former importance was linked to salt production. Today it is revered as a gastronomic capital, famous for its fresh seafood and, in particular, oysters, which you have an opportunity to taste. There may be time to walk the famous walls, the longest in 14th century Europe, before proceeding to a luxury hotel in magnificent Dubrovnik. A final celebration takes place at an excellent local restaurant where you toast your week's adventures.

Hotel Grand Villa Argentina, Dubrovnik – 1st of 1 night with tour – then stay on +3 nights
Dubrovnik, Croatia Tel 011 385 20 440 555 Email reservations@alh.hr
Conf#1579776 for additional 3 nights in superior room with sea view
www.adriaticluxuryhotels.com/en/grand-villa-argentina/
Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

A luxury hotel with private beach, swimming pool, and spa, within walking distance of the historic city-center.

Sat Sep 26 - DAY 8

Tour of Dubrovnik; 2 miles, easy city walking

Your tour concludes with a walking tour of "The Pearl on the Adriatic," as Lord Byron so famously described Dubrovnik. This much-celebrated town, a World Heritage site, is completely encircled by over a mile of beautifully preserved walls built between the 13th and 16th centuries. Historically, they

provided protection against all intruders, from the Saracens to the Turks, coming by way of sea. You explore the town's main works of art, learn about its history of proud and fierce economic and political independence from Venice, marvel at the loving way the town was restored after the shelling in 1991, and take pleasure in discovering its architectural details and narrow alleys. Late morning you say goodbye, continuing on your exploration of this enchanting coast or making connections to Dubrovnik Airport for your departure.

11:30am Tour ends

Hotel Grand Villa Argentina in Dubrovnik for 3 nights additional – conf # above

Tue Sep 29

7:25am Depart Dubrovnik DBV via Croatia Air dba United #7255

9:30am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

11:20am Depart Frankfurt FRA via UA#961

2:05pm Arrive Newark EWR

Links

See pictures at <http://www.matthewwilliams-ellis.com/croatia-photography-highlights-dubrovnik-dalmatian-coast/>

Video and article at 36 Hours in Split, Croatia - The New York Times

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/travel/what-to-do-in-36-hours-in-split-croatia.html?em_pos=medium&emc=edit_tl_20150627&nl=travel&nid=22982744&ref=headline&r=0

Welcoming Croatia shunned by refugees:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/05/welcoming-croatia-shunned-refugees-150513065939048.html>

Refugees in Croatia cook their way into inclusion:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/06/refugees-croatia-food-syria-nigeria-150624102007686.html>

<https://www.ricksteves.com/watch-read-listen/video/tv-show/croatia-adriatic-delights>

<http://www.puretravel.com/blog/2013/08/03/top-7-things-to-do-on-the-dalmatian-coast-in-croatia/>

Map Image from <http://www.highonadventure.com/Hoa03oct/Dalmatia/mapcroatia-infonet1.jpg>.

ITINERARY CHANGES - Please bear in mind that this is a typical itinerary, and the actual activities, sites, and accommodations may vary due to season, special events, weather, or transportation schedules. We reserve the right to alter the itinerary, since tour arrangements are made up to a year in advance and unforeseen circumstances may arise that mandate change. Itinerary changes are made to improve the tour and your experience.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL - For more than 36 years, Country Walkers has been a leader in active travel, with responsible tourism an integral part of our core values. Our tours reflect our dedication to best travel practices—and to the preservation of indigenous cultures and the environment. Country Walkers has made a donation on behalf of every traveler to the CW Travelers Fund, which supports designated projects in the communities and habitats in which we travel. We invite you to learn more about our efforts and initiatives for giving back. Here's just one example that highlights our sustainable practices: Bracki pupoljci: Country Walkers makes a donation on behalf of every tour participant to this nonprofit organization. They offer horseback riding therapy for disabled kids on the Island of Brač and are in desperate need of funds to help them buy more horses. On tour, a representative from the organization will come and visit guests at dinner and explain what they do and thank the group for their generous donation.

Land Only Itinerary Overview

LAND ONLY TOUR MEETING POINT

Atrium Hotel (lobby), Split, Croatia. 9:30 a.m. Domovinskograta 49a Split, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 200 000

NIGHTS 1 & 2

Hotel Pastura Postira, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 740 000 Email info@hotelpastura.hr hotelpastura.hr
Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

NIGHTS 3 & 4

Hotel Adriana Hvar, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 750 200 Email adriana@suncanihar.com
suncanihar.com/Adriana-hvar-spa-hotel.html Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

NIGHTS 5 & 6

Hotel Marko Polo Korčula, Croatia Tel 011 385 20 726 100 Email hotel-markopolo@htp-korcula.hr
korcula-hotels.com/en/hotels/hotel-marko-plo.php Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

NIGHT 7

Grand Villa Argentina Dubrovnik, Croatia Tel 011 385 20 440 555 Email reservations@alh.hr
adriaticluxuryhotels.com/en/grand-villa-argentina/ Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

LAND ONLY TOUR DEPARTURE POINT

Grand Villa Argentina, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 11:30 a.m.

Tour Facts at a Glance

LAND ONLY TOUR LENGTH - 8 days, 7 nights

LAND ONLY DEPARTURE DATES - May 16, 2015 May 24, 2015 June 13, 2015 September 5, 2015
September 19, 2015 October 3, 2015

LAND ONLY TOUR MEETING POINT - Atrium Hotel (lobby), Split, Croatia. 9:30 a.m.

LAND ONLY TOUR DEPARTURE POINT - Grand Villa Argentina, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 11:30 a.m.

ACTIVITY LEVEL - This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 4 to 6 miles per day, with options on some days. There are daily ascents and descents, with climbing time on the ascents ranging from about 15 to 45 minutes. The terrain varies from paved and cobblestone streets (during organized city tours and other easy village exploration) to uneven, single-track trails with loose stones or gravel, rocky coastal paths, ancient ruins, and sets of ancient

stone steps. The trails are often exposed to the sun. Days are quite full on this tour due to the inclusion of many ferry and catamaran transfers in order to island hop.

INCLUSIONS - Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7 » All meals except for one lunch and one dinner; local wine or beer included with dinners » All accommodations while on tour » Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point » Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary » The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff

LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN - Prior to your adventure you will receive: » Guest Information and Acknowledgment Forms to complete and return at least 90 days prior to your tour » Luggage tags » List of travel companions and guide(s) » Your trip invoice

GRATUITIES - Gratuities for all hotels, meals, and services that are included in your tour price will be paid by Country Walkers. Should you wish to tip your Country Walkers guide(s), the standard in the industry ranges from \$10 to \$15 per person, per guide, per day (or \$20 to \$30 per couple, per guide, per day), and can be paid in USD or local currency.

Traveling To and From Your Tour

LAND ONLY TOUR MEETING POINT - Atrium Hotel (lobby), Split, Croatia. 9:30 a.m.

Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for city walking.

MOST CONVENIENT ARRIVAL AIRPORT - Split International Airport (SPU) split-airport.hr

GETTING TO THE MEETING POINT

A taxi from the airport to the Atrium Hotel is approximately 225-250 Croatian kunas (approximately 30-35 euros). Travel time is 20-30 minutes. You may also arrange a private transfer directly through the Atrium Hotel for approximately 300 Croatian kunas (approximately 40 euros). Public Pleso Prijevoz buses depart shortly after the arrival of all regularly scheduled domestic and international flights. A bus from the airport to the center of Split costs approximately 30 kunas (approximately 4 euros) and takes 20-30 minutes. The Atrium Hotel is a 10- to 15-minute steep walk from the bus station, located down at the harbor, or you may switch to bus number 7 that stops one block from the hotel. For further information visit plesoprijevoz.hr.

PRE-TOUR ACCOMMODATIONS - We recommend arriving in Split at least one day before the tour starts. This will give you time to rest after your travels and recover from any effects of jet lag. You may wish to stay at the Atrium Hotel (the meeting point hotel) in Split for the night before your tour. Please note that this is a four-star business-style hotel located 10 minutes (on foot) from the Riva, or waterfront promenade. For reservations, contact the hotel directly, refer to the fact that you are joining a "Country Walkers Group" and request a faxed or written reply. Offer your credit card number as a guarantee when making the reservation. The staff at the hotel speaks English, so you should have no problem in communicating with them. We recommend that you make your pre-tour reservations at your earliest convenience, as this is a popular hotel.

Atrium Hotel Domovinskograta 49a Split, Croatia Tel 011 385 21 200 000 Fax 011 385 21 200 100

Email reservations@hotel-atrium.hr hotel-atrium.hr

Room rates vary according to season and room type. A superior double is 200 euros in May and 210 euros in June, September and October. A superior single is 170 euros in May and 180 euros in June, September and October. Rates include breakfast and VAT, use of fitness area, pool, jacuzzi, sauna, and wireless internet. A tourist tax of approximately 1 euro per person is additional. Should you prefer a boutique hotel in the heart of the old town for your pre-tour stay, we recommend the impeccably restored Vestibul Palace.

DELAYS AND LATE ARRIVALS - If you are delayed while traveling, or for any reason miss the scheduled group meeting, please telephone the meeting point hotel, Atrium Hotel in Split, and leave a message for your guide(s) as to your estimated time of arrival. Since you will likely be traveling on a

weekend for this tour, and due to the time change, it is not advisable to leave this message at the Country Walkers office.

LAND ONLY TOUR DEPARTURE POINT - Grand Villa Argentina, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 11:30 a.m. There is a guided city tour of Dubrovnik on the last day of the tour. You may choose to continue your explorations of this beautiful coast or connect to your next destination. If you are departing Dubrovnik the day the tour ends, the hotel reception and/or your guides will assist you in arranging a taxi to Dubrovnik Airport at your own expense (20-30 minutes).

MOST CONVENIENT DEPARTURE AIRPORT - Cilipi International Airport in Dubrovnik (DBV) is the most convenient airport for your departure (requires connection if traveling to the U.S.) airport-dubrovnik.hr

Depending on your destination, it may not be possible to depart Croatia on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Information & Policies

GUARANTEED DEPARTURES - Country Walkers guarantees the departure of every tour*—no exceptions and no disappointments! From the moment you make your deposit, you can start preparing for your adventure. We take care of all the details to ensure a seamless, small-group experience (with an average of 6 or 7 guests per guide). For best availability, reserve your trip today! *except in cases of force majeure

RESERVATIONS - Reservations for this tour may be made by calling 800.464.9255. We can confirm your reservation with a deposit of \$500 per person. Final tour cost is due 90 days prior to tour departure date. As arrangements are confirmed at least a year in advance, the price is subject to change.

GUEST RESPONSIBILITIES - Each guest has the responsibility to select a trip appropriate to his/her abilities and interests and to prepare for the trip by carefully reading the confirmation materials. To join this trip, you must be in good health and capable of completing activities as described in the day-to-day itinerary. Our in-house experts welcome the opportunity to discuss the tour in more detail. In order to meet your needs, we ask that you please share any relevant physical limitations or health conditions when you make your reservation.

CANCELLATION POLICY - Cancellations received 91 days or more prior to the tour start date will incur a loss of \$100; cancellations received between 90 and 61 days prior to the tour start date incur a loss of 25 percent of the tour price; there are no refunds within 60 days of the tour start date. Up to 91 days prior to departure, you may transfer your reservation, depending on availability, from one departure to another in the same calendar year at no cost*. Please notify us in writing. *One transfer per year; afterwards a modest per person transfer fee will apply. Please note that tours with seasonal prices may involve a higher price.

TRAVEL INSURANCE - We offer guests the opportunity to purchase a Travel Protection Plan. Please contact us for details.