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## Croatia

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### Top 10 Croatian highlights



Touted as the 'new this' and the 'new that' for years since its reemergence on the world tourism scene, it is now clear that [Croatia](#) is a unique destination that can hold its own and then some: this is a country with a glorious 1778km-long coast and a staggering 1185 islands.

The Adriatic coast is a knockout: its limpid sapphire waters draw visitors to remote islands, hidden coves and traditional fishing villages, all while touting the glitzy beach and yacht scene. [Istria](#) is captivating thanks to its gastronomic delights and wines, and the bars, clubs and festivals of [Zagreb](#), [Zadar](#) and [Split](#) remain little-explored gems. Eight national parks protect pristine forests, karst mountains, rivers, lakes and waterfalls in a landscape of primeval beauty. Punctuate all this with breathtaking [Dubrovnik](#) in the south – a country couldn't wish for a better finale.

#### 1. Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik is the star of the show, dazzling all with its heart-stopping beauty. It's packed with five star hotels, high-class restaurants and countless tourists, but move away from the main streets and there's still much to discover.

#### 2. Hvar Town

Hvar Town is home to posh yachting and a see-and-be-seen crowd. You'll certainly find a luxurious place to lay your head here – when you're not out partying. But the sunniest place in the country (2724 hours a year) also holds a few surprises. Lavender plants and aromatic herbs fill the inland fields, and Jelsa is an intimate port town within easy reach of swimming coves and sandy spots.

#### 3. Adriatic Sea

It may be obvious, but it's hard not to over-emphasise the beauty of the Adriatic. It's smooth, silky and translucent, and the colour (in turn electric blue, jade green and steely) is unmatched. Fish will tickle your calves as you step in, and watch out for sea urchins.

#### 4. Diocletian's Palace

One of the world's most impressive Roman ruins in existence, these UNESCO-protected remains still serve the very purpose they were built for: life is lived inside them. As the city of [Split](#)'s heart, soul and most of its arteries, Diocletian's Palace is packed with shoppers, bar-hoppers, workers, kids and tourists. It's a real beauty.

#### 5. Zadar

You may not have heard as much about Zadar as other coastal towns, but you should have. A lively cafe scene and bustling market bring this little town to life. The marble-clad, traffic-free old town follows the old Roman street plan, complete with ruins which dazzle, as does its nightlife. Feel the might of the circular Church of St Donat in Dalmatia when you stand in its shadow.

#### 6. Cruising the Dalmatian coast

Croatia's most scenic ferry ride is the nine hours spent cruising between [Split](#) and [Dubrovnik](#). Sunbathe while you soak in the rugged shoreline views, and islands like [Hvar](#) and [Korčula](#) pass by at a leisurely pace. The boat trip takes about twice as long as the bus, but it sure is worth it.

#### 7. Cafe culture, Zagreb

One of the nicest ways to experience *špica*, the Saturday morning and pre-lunch coffee drinking ritual, is on a terrace in [Zagreb](#), a year-round outdoor city. Order your macchiato (strong espresso-like *kava* diluted with milk) and watch the world go by. On summer nights the scene resembles a vast outdoor party.

#### 8. Sailing

Possibly the most popular activity on the Adriatic, the privileged and much-envied owners of sailing boats or those renting them can exercise their biceps while gliding between the beautiful Croatian islands. The most popular place to dock is [Hvar](#), but use your chance to discover some of the more difficult-to-reach islands such as [Kornati](#) or [Elafiti](#).

#### 9. Plitvice Lakes National Park

A verdant maze of paths, woods and meadows revolves around 16 sparkling lakes and crashing waterfalls at [Plitvice](#). It's a World Heritage site and Croatia's most popular national park – also much loved by its resident bears and wolves and over 120 species of birds.

#### 10 Slow food

Check out Croatia's own version of slow food, which is all about promoting local, fresh and seasonal ingredients, and enjoying the ritual of eating. Not only that, but each course is paired with fitting wines. Go on, get proficient in the joy of eating.

