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Croatia - from Venice to Zadar



Always to follow the LLLL rule: lead, log, longitude and lookout. Keep an eye around and always be sure of where you are and what you are supposed to have below your craft

Venice stands in a class of her own, but few have the smart idea to avoid the crowds and get there with a sailboat! You'll never regret the experience of watching the city emerging from the morning mist in the silence of an anchorage in the lagoon. Then Trieste, where Austria met the sea, and its unique cultural and architectural mixture that fascinated Joyce and many others. Its Piazza Unità, with a side open to the sea, has been recently restored and is considered the most beautiful square in Italy. But the voyage has just begun: discover the natural beauty of Croatia, the villages of Losinj and Rovinji, and the astonishing Island of Brioni where Tito, always a smart chap, established a private residence and park that is still perfectly preserved.



Suggested tour : Venice - Trieste - Porec - Rovinj - Briuni - Cres - Losinj - Olib - Premuda - Silba - Krk - Opatja.

Mileage (approx) :160 – 180 miles one way

Difficulty : medium, Bora can make the area a tough place.

Warning: Croatia is NOT in the European Union, therefore you must clear in first thing at a convenient port of entry. A sailing tax is demanded. Convenient ports of entry are Umag, Porec, Rovinj, Pula. Croatians are very serious about papers.

Weather and navigation.

The prudent sailor never casts off with the assumption that Nelson was right when he said 'there are three excellent harbours in the Med: Mahon, July and August'. Strong winds, cold fronts, thunderstorms and squalls must be expected at any month, even if they are of course less common in summer. True, safe havens, coves and bays abound along the Dalmatian coastline, and the endless channels provide smooth sailing even in strong winds. But nevertheless some cons must be reported. First of all some anchorages look bottomless. So always make sure that you are leaving with a long and heavy anchor chain, a serious spare anchor, possibly a fisherman, and lines to lay ashore in constricted waters and/or for better protection. Second, the more or less complete absence of sandy beaches indicates that sand is unlikely to be the **bottom** your anchor will fall on. Rocks, grass and other delicacies are more likely, and none rank high among the preference of sailors. So set your anchor well, have a look at it whenever possible with your snorkelling gear and always choose to lay out warps ashore towards the direction of the stronger prevailing winds whenever possible. Trees and rocks are there to work as cleats, what else? The bad guys are Bora (NE), NW and SW. **Bora can be very distressing.** True, it comes from the shore, but it can kick up something nasty enough in a few miles, especially in the north and the



Kvaerner. It is less to be feared S of Hvar, where southerlies are worse. Northerlies are usually associated to a cold front, so expect them to arrive when the barometer stops falling. Make sure the barometer works.

Another drawback of the blessed geography of Croatia is the number of **rocks** awash or just below the water, especially around the Kornati archipelago. A chart plotter is a good help, especially if it is not a long walk away from the helm. But the best is always to follow the LLLL rule, lead, log, longitude and lookout. Keep an eye around and always be sure of where you are and what you are supposed to have below your craft.

Local Insight

Again this is concentrated in the gentle, proud and open-hearted people of the islands. A strange historical pot-pourri of Italians and Slavs, some individuals show the best of both culture, others... well, do not. Same old...same old... For local insight you must follow our local skipper and you'll never regret the experience (although your liver might complain a lot...).

Art and Museums

Five stars, best artistic itinerary hands down. Venice and its art and Trieste's culture and cafes. Period. No other section of the planet's coast is so packed with history, art and heritage..

Style, elegance and social life

Again a must. The film festival and the Carnival in Venice are world renowned appointments. Trieste hosts the [Barcolana](#), most crowded regatta in the world (1825 boats in the 2006 edition) on the second sunday in October, and the event is another special occasion.

Gastronomy and wines

The Italian section of the cruise needs no introduction, but a word of praise to the Croatian cuisine and the spectacular prawns of the Quaerner channel. The local gastronomy is not particularly refined and suffered the lack of enthusiasm, to say the least, of nearly 40 long years of communism. On the other side, if you are convinced that 'every complication added to the preparation of a fish is a step towards disaster', then you have found your place. Among the NTBM (not to be missed) list of delicacies you must try in Croatia, a special mention goes to prawns and shrimps, Dalmatian ham, fresh fish in general in the Split area (San Peter's and bass), fruits and vegetables (peaches are excellent), truffles. Beef should be preferred over chicken, and mutton is excellent but wildish in taste. Oysters around Dubrovnik, cheese from Pag, broiled sardines in Sibenik and Kali. Sausages and salami are very good, although far from Corsican perfection. Try beef or fish cooked in the peka, a utensil that is put under the burning coals. Around Hvar you have to try a Gregada, a fish soup in a very tasty stock. Then octopus salads and shellfish in general. While we noted with sadness that most fish goes straight from the boats to the restaurants, we also must remark that they make a very good use of it. Without being pretentious, the Croatian restaurants we tried work well indeed. As a matter of fact, when compared to their French and Italian counterparts in the touristy areas, they win hands down, with a greater genuinity, a higher respect for the client and a better price/quality ratio. Wine: Croatia doesn't rank high in the ratings of world wine, and one does not take much to understand why. The price/quality ratio is depressing, and one is tempted to buy crown-cap, 1-litre bottles of white just to risk less. Some bottles we found very good, like some dry Malvasias, but with that money you buy better everywhere else, and, moreover, you can buy tons of excellent beer. Lasko, Slatorog and Karlovacko are some of the brands, but we must underline that Croatian and Slovenian beers do deserve a mention. Malty and hoppy, tasty at every temperature, tasting even if industrial, the drinker won't be deceived.

And, by the way, Trieste is the European Capital of Coffee... (Illy, Hausbrandt and others)

Restaurants:

Coop. Pescatori (molo coperto) - Muggia (TS) +39 040 275331

Fora per Fora via Diaz 9 - Trieste +39 040 9197873

Enoteca Marino, prossimità piazza Unità - Trieste

Sidro - Lussin Grande - Porto Vecchio

Rovigno - ristorante 'Da Mario'

Bepi - Novigrad (Cittanova)

Pirano (Slovenia) - 'Fontane'



Sailing directions

Venice. Again we underline how practical and smart is a visit to Venice on a private cruise, where you can enjoy the magic of the city without paying its outrageous prices and average service qualities.

Trieste has only one problem: Venice. Had the famous city been somewhere else, Trieste would deservedly be an important tourist destination. Castles on the sea, a fascinating old quarter packed with taverns and wine bars, a world famous collection of cafès, Austrian architecture and cultural venues around its unique square on the harbour, are just a brief introduction to the European capital of coffee. The harbour is wide even if places are hard to come by. The suggestion is to contact the port captain, very formally, and request a transit dock or, lacking this, a temporary dock along the piers.

Porec: although not as flashy as Rovinj, Porec certainly deserves a stop and it's a convenient port of entry.

Istrian Coast: the whole coast is literally packed with anchorages and bays. In some cases you have to pay to anchor. Most are open to the west. In this case find shelter in one of the splendid coves in the Medulin bay, at the S tip of the Istrian peninsula

Rovinj. This village is a jewel of Venetian architecture. Situated on a perfectly sized peninsula with a well sheltered harbour, its round alleys among grey stone houses with terra-cotta roofs are a place to get lost in, enjoying some of the local restaurants, such as the famous Mario's.

Briunj. Dictators might be evil but usually they are far from stupid. Tito declared this island his own private playground, built a 'house' accordingly (alas following cold-war style), filled it with animals, still there, closed it up for his own use. Now it's a national park where everyone can enjoy a bicycle ride among bambis and other animals, diving into bays where all boats are banned. You indeed have to use the local harbour, not cheap but the price include the park fee and the use of the hotel restrooms, where you can have a clear idea about how the red potents lived.

Cres: located roughly in the middle of the very long Island bearing the same name, it boasts a cosy town, good restaurants, a modern marina, and it's a convenient place to leave the boat to explore Cres.

Mali Losinij. The town is divided into two parts, Mali (big) and Veli (small), but actually the Mali one is the smaller, cuter more attractive. Very attractive indeed, with its wall 'promenade', small harbour and good restaurants where you can splurge in prawns, the local absolute culinary marvel. Try the Sidro and tell them Sandra sent you. Several anchorages in the bays around

Olib, Silba and Premuda. These three islands represent anything you can look for in a small island. Atmosphere, fishermen's anchorages and small havens, isolated locals, blue waters, home-style gourmet and the priceless impression you come from another century.

Krk, Rjeka and Kvaerner: this wild and windbeaten group of channels and islands is a sheltered body of water and if you sail in a calm day you'll wonder why trees are so scarce and the landscape to harsh. Try to sail here with Bora and you'll have the answer. Raging at speed not uncommonly reaching 80 knots, this cold wind can transform this area is a nautical hell. But if the weather is nice



and settled, it's certainly a beautiful sailin destination with many anchorages and towns. Opatja was the poshest resort of the Yugoslavian elite and the villas are impressive, and the quality of the service did not improve much from those days.