



Sparkling emerald green water. Quaint towns, perched atop ocean cliffs. Colourful villages, with bustling laneways. Burnt orange sunsets and old-fashioned boats.

And no, I'm not talking about Greece. But, east, along Croatia's Dalmatian Coast.

The mysterious pocket of eastern Europe: the Balkans.

Over the past few years, word has spread about Croatia, like backpackers' Chinese whispers.

But, the unique essence of this small country abounds with experiences... from its now-famous coastline and Plitvice Lakes to character towns and culinary traditions.



The view of the beaches on Croatia's Dalmatian Coast.

Dubrovnik to Split...

On the southern stretch of land where Croatia adjoins Bosnia, is the medieval old town of Dubrovnik. Peppered with notable Game of Thrones filming locations, this jewel in the Adriatic is a good destination to begin your Croatia adventures.

We booked a 7-day tour with Busabout, which hugged the coastline, stopping at various island gems. The boat was fully equipped and everything was included for the 7 days, apart from optional activities, drinks, and snacks. We'd port at different islands overnight, and sail between locations, exploring towns.



Begin your adventure in Croatia with a boat tour.

You'll be in good company, too. There are dozens of these boats that follow different routes in this region, but it won't feel like it when you're stopped in between these dreamy islands – taking a midday dip in the glistening ocean, jumping off the top of the boat, as everyone does.

We visited Mljet, Korčula, Vis, Hvar and Brač, before making our way into the port town of Split. But this isn't just a stopover town. With its beaches, Diocletian's Palace (built by the Roman emperor in the 4th century) and bustling harbour, you're going to want to spend a couple of days in Split.



A sailing tour is a great way to explore the routes in this area.

7 days sailing, 3+ days land

I've actually been back to Croatia since this first sailing trip. Like most tours, they give you a snapshot into the country, offering a taste of different regions, attractions, and the local culture.

There will be places you're drawn to more than others. I fell in love with two places: Hvar and Split. I would suggest allowing 10 days if you're visiting Croatia for the first time. This way, you can enjoy a couple of days, either side of the sailing trip.



Wander the city streets and soak up the culture.

There's a lot to discover in Dubrovnik and Split, and the last thing you want is to rush it and only see a little of the land. Although, you certainly won't be disappointed with the islands. If you've got some extra time, make your way further north up the coast to the ancient old town of Zadar. This is a great send-off point if you're travelling over to southern Italy.



Why Croatia is the Ultimate European Summer Holiday

But, if you're staying in Europe's enchanting east, head less than two hours north to the magical Plitvice Lakes National Park. Here, deeper into the heart of Croatia, marvel at the 295-square-forest with 16 lakes and waterfalls that extend into a limestone canyon.



The waterfalls in Plitvice Lakes National Park are simply magical. Image: The Minority Nomad

Planning your Croatia adventures

First, decide how long you'll have in Croatia. Yes, it's possible just to do a few days, flying into a coastal town and doing a couple of day trips out to the islands. But, given these towns aren't big cities, the flights aren't as cheap as you'd expect in places like Barcelona, Athens or Rome.

Give yourself at least a week. Fly into Split, and travel down to Dubrovnik via sail, or the other direction. Split's main airport is about an hour drive from the port, so allow approximately A\$50 for the taxi.



Book your sailing tour in advance so you don't miss out.

We used Booking.com for our accommodation, which was basic, at about A\$30 a night. You don't need to pre-book any activities in these towns. The best way to experience them is on-foot, meandering your way through the buzzing, ancient pedestrian streets. Wander the fortresses (with ice cream in hand, of course) and soak up the energy of these small cities, before you spend a week at sea.

Busabout arranged the boat tour, which cost us between A\$1,000 – \$1,500 at the time. Spots fill up fast, especially in the summer, so consider paying your deposit this year, for next July-September.



When you're on land, make sure you visit the historical fortresses. Image: Tourdesk

Visas, currency & packing

Australians don't need a tourist visa to enter Croatia, as long as you leave within 90 days. I paired my Croatia trip with Greece, Italy and Spain, so it was easy to plan as a whole. Skyscanner is my flight platform of choice.



A summer adventure in Croatia means packing light.

I allowed A\$50 a day for spending, outside of accommodation and transport. Kuna is the local currency, but don't worry if you have Euros. Most places accept either currency. Expect gorgeous oh-so-Mediterranean temperatures, around 30°C, so you can pack light and minimally for warm temperatures.



The emerald waters of Croatia are waiting for you.

A treasure, waiting to be discovered

Fascinating fortresses, medieval towns, crystal clear emerald waters and lakes so gorgeous you won't believe your eyes, Croatia will give you the European summer experience you



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dream of... but plus oh, so much more.

What's your favourite summer destination in Europe?