

# HIP HIP HVAR!

IF STYLISH HOTELS, A SMATTERING OF CELEBS AND BEAUTIFUL BEACHES ARE YOUR THING, HEAD TO CROATIA

**T**he mesmerising Croatian island of Hvar is giving Ibiza and St Tropez a run for their money in terms of A-list celeb count. You'll find the glitzy harbour of Hvar Town awash with mega-yachts during the summer months, while Bill Gates, HRH Prince Harry, Beyoncé, Pierce Brosnan, George Clooney and Gwyneth Paltrow have all popped by in recent years.

A long stretch of pine groves, lavender fields and vineyards poking out into the Adriatic Sea, the approach to the island of Hvar, by short hydrofoil or ferry ride from the coastal city of Split, is simply spectacular. The arrival into the medieval harbour of Hvar Town is equally dramatic, with its charming Venetian honey-hued architecture tumbling down to a picture-postcard perfect bay.

## Why should I go?

With approximately 1,244 islands to choose from, Croatia isn't short of a castaway paradise or three. Its Adriatic Sea coastline is punctuated with fjords, coves and headlands and is surrounded by tiny islets carpeted with cascading pine forests and enchanting towns designed by the Venetians and Austrians.

The past ten years have seen some seriously upscale hotels open their doors and nowhere is this more evident than on the island of Hvar. A super-cool crowd has followed in their wake, with their yachts jostling for space in the harbour. Dubbed the new St Tropez by some, we think Hvar is prettier, less spoiled and more affordable than the French resort. In fact, just a stone's throw from the designer-clad visitors and glitzy restaurants that line the harbour front, you'll find quintessential Croatian wine bars in the jumble of narrow streets where delicious unpretentious fare is dished out lovingly. There's also the Baroque cathedral to admire, the hilltop fortress to climb and a couple of glasses of local Plavac wine to be sipped on the lovely medieval piazza.

## Where can I stay?

The Suncani Hvar Hotels ([www.suncanihvar.com](http://www.suncanihvar.com)) offers three deluxe hotels – Amfora, Riva and Adriana – in Hvar. Central Hvar Town can get pretty busy in the peak summer months so if you want to dip in and out of the action, base yourself at the Hotel Amfora, a lovely ten-minute walk along the bay. This low-rise 324-room hotel offers stylish contemporary decor. Make sure you ask for one of the bedrooms with a balcony overlooking the sea. The hotel's *pièce de résistance* is its new cascading swimming pool that comes complete with poolside restaurant, tree-adorned islets, swim-up bar and an awesome water slide.

OK!'s perfect morning wake-up call! Another hotel highlight is its Bonj Beach Club housed in a white stone colonnade complex that harks back to the '30s and features private cabanas, the Sensori spa and a bayside restaurant.

For something more central, the Riva is a hot, hip and happening hotel with modern art (including portraits of Audrey Hepburn and James Dean), retro furniture and a glorious waterfront terrace with mesmerising views out to the Pakleni Islands. But perhaps Hvar's most glamorous bolthole is the achingly cool Adriana Hotel & Spa. Rooms are drop dead gorgeous, but the real allure of this place is the rooftop pool bar with breathtaking views across the bay.

## When should I go?

If you're visiting this week (August 17-23), make sure you head to Split, as the townspeople transform the city back to the days of Emperor Diocletian. Participants dress in the traditional attire of togas and tunics, while vintage carriages pass along the waterfront, taking the emperor to the peristyle (colonnaded court).

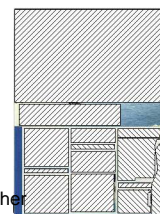
## Where can I eat?

Croatian cuisine is a delightful blend of Italian, Balkan, Austrian, Hungarian and local specialties. The air-dried ham *pršut* stands out and the sharp and salty Pag cheese is the perfect accompaniment. Hvar is seafood heaven and no trip should be complete without sampling local dish *Gregada*, a sublime concoction of fish, potatoes and white wine.

OK! enjoyed some wonderful reasonably priced seafood at Junior in Hvar Town, but if it's out-and-out glamour you're after head to Carpe Diem, Hvar Town's most fashionable hangout. If there's an A-lister on the island, this is where you'll find them – Eva Longoria among them. Or take a water taxi out to the bar's private beach on Stipanska Bay in the Pakleni Islands, renowned for its party atmosphere. The beach club hosts an amazing seafood barbecue each Sunday, while dinner highlights include scampi in a courgette and Parmesan cream or rump steak in fig, ginger and red wine sauce.

## Which stars will I see?

A steady trail of A-listers have been dropping in on Hvar, including Bill Gates, Steven Spielberg, Brad





Pitt, Ashley Judd, Catherine Zeta Jones, Michael Douglas and Gwyneth Paltrow. And then there were those pictures last summer of Prince Harry famously jumping into a pool at the Veneranda nightclub fully clothed! It's also been reported that Beyoncé named her baby Blue Ivy after she and her husband Jay-Z admired a tree wrapped with blue-hued ivy while visiting the island last year when she was pregnant. When the mayor of Hvar heard about this, he made little Blue Ivy an honorary citizen of Hvar.

### *What sights must I see?*

Hvar has its own little box of gems just lying off the coast of Hvar Town in the form of the dazzling Pakleni archipelago – 18 tiny, often deserted specks of loveliness a short and exhilarating water taxi ride from the harbour. Many of the islands are favourites with naturists, so prepare to ditch that swimming costume if you're brave enough!

Like Beyoncé, OK! headed to Palmizana on the island of Sveti Klement. Carpeted in sweet smelling rosemary, this beautiful piece of heaven boasts a couple of superb places to eat and a stunning bay. OK! recommends the Meneghello restaurant, where squid and octopus is scooped fresh out of the sea. Follow this with some Dalmatian-style chicken cooked with rosemary and washed down with a chilled glass of local white wine.

Dazzling Split is only an hour away by hydrofoil if you fancy some big city glitz – and it boasts the incredible Roman jewel Diocletian's Palace. This UNESCO-listed fort is a living breathing city-within-the-city that is anything but a ruin.

Or, to escape the hustle and bustle of Hvar Town, hop in a taxi to Stari Grad on the north coast. This is the oldest town in Croatia, dating back to 384BC and founded by Greeks, so there's a couple of millennia of history to inhale through the beautiful buildings.

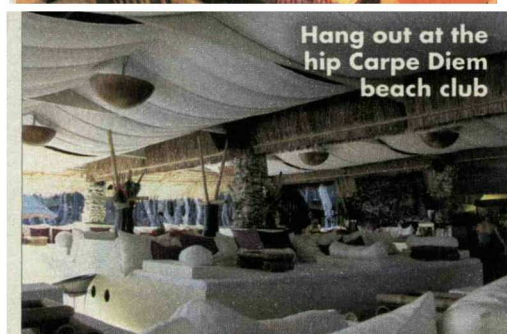
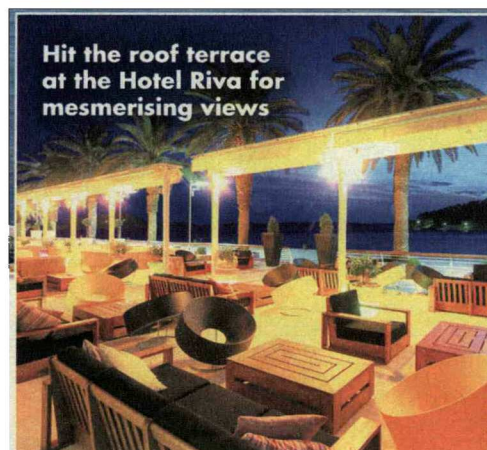
### *How do I get there?*

Transun (www.transun.co.uk; 01865 265 200) offer exclusive Heavenly Hvar itineraries including flights, transfers, three nights B&B accommodation and three guided excursions, from £599pp. A seven-night trip staying at the Amfora including flights, transfers, breakfast and two guided excursions costs from £749pp.

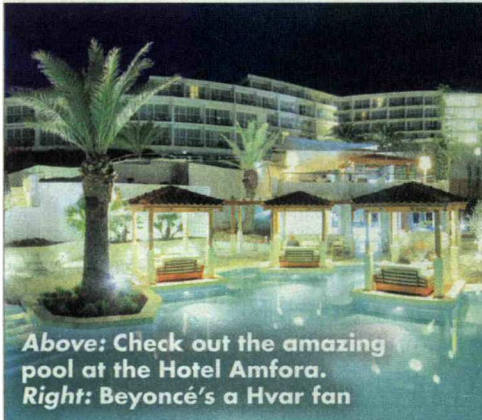
**OK!**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THE TOURIST BOARD'S OFFICIAL WEBSITE AT WWW.CROATIA.HR OR PICK UP A COPY OF 'AN INSIDER GUIDE TO HVAR' BY PAUL BRADLEY. HVAR ADVENTURE CAN ORGANISE ALL KINDS OF ACTIVITIES SUCH AS KAYAKING OR VINEYARD TOURS. VISIT WWW.HVAR-ADVENTURE.COM.

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**Main: Hvar is something of a celebrity hotspot – and with views like this, who can blame the A-list for popping by!**

