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TAKE A SHINE TO CROATIA

FROM QUAYSIDE GLAMOUR TO RURAL RETREATS, CROATIA HAS MUCH TO OFFER. JONATHAN BASTABLE EXPLORES TWO OF ITS HIGHLIGHTS: THE ISTRIAN PENINSULA AND THE ISLAND OF HVAR, THE SUNNIEST PLACE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDERS OVERGARD



The old fishing port of Rovinj, in Istria, presided over by its Baroque Church of St Euphemia

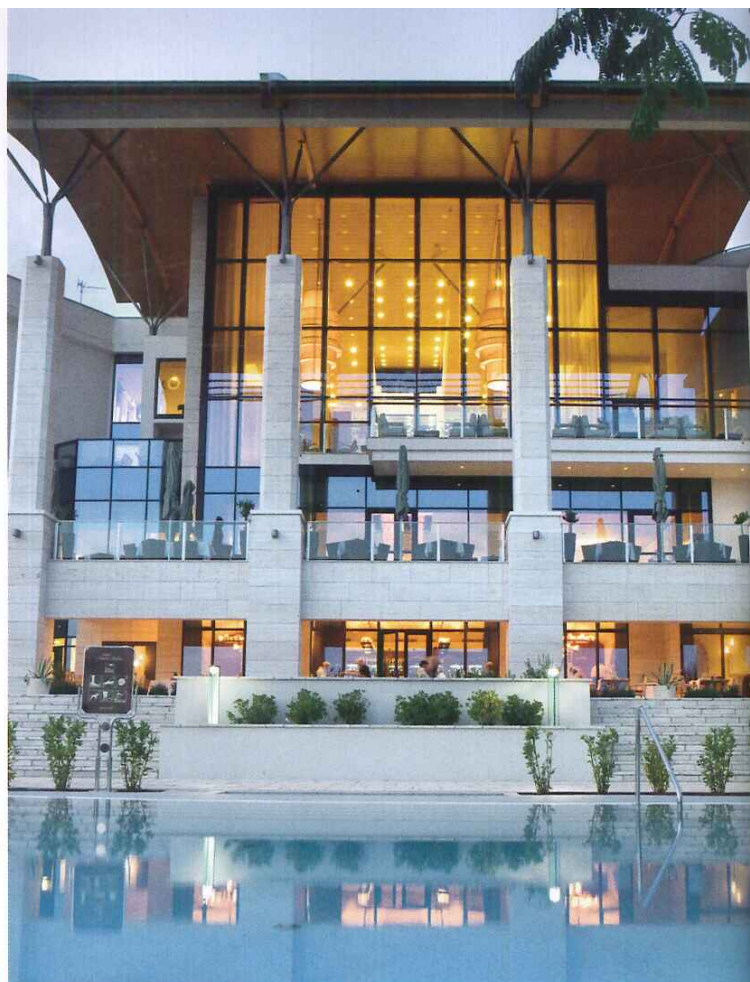
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HE MENU AT the Wine Vault is a thing of beauty. It is a big book in leather covers, like a slimmed-down Bible. Inside, each dish has a page to itself, and every page is illuminated with a colourful sketch of the dish in question. The drawings are neatly annotated in capital letters, and these comments read like the chef's notes to himself: 'Make sure it's crusty,' reads the crib on the duck confit; and on the lamb chops and sweetbreads: 'Six-minute rest – a must!' The images are wonderfully intriguing, very appetising, and a rather handy guide to what you are going to see on your plate. They amount to an upscale version of the laminated photographic card you used to get at a sit-down Wimpy. As for the food at the Wine Vault, it more than fulfils the visual promise of the menu: the escabeche of red snapper was an edible picture, a Hirst spin painting consisting of pearly fish, caramelised blood orange, lime-marinated mango and tiny little green leaves.

The Wine Vault is the fine-dining restaurant at Hotel Monte Mulini, a terrifically swish new hotel in the town of Rovinj, on the Istrian peninsula. This triangle of land, the northernmost part of Croatia, is about as far as you can get from the well-known city of Dubrovnik and still be in the same country. As a consequence, Istria is under-appreciated, less well trod than Dalmatia in the Croatian south. And that's a shame, because this is a rather fine little corner of Europe, a enjoyable triangular territory that you can manageably explore in a few days.

Istria is also close to Italy, and this proximity is what gives the place its special character. The signs on the highways are in Italian as well as Croatian: 'Rovinj, Rovigno,' they say. It is the same in town, where two words for road precede every street name: everywhere is both an *ulica* and a *via*, or a *trg* and a *piazza*. Most people speak both Italian and Croatian, and the fishermen in the port speak a dialect known as Istro-Veneto, which is a blend of the two. The Roman and the Slavic mix like wine and water in the speech of Istrian people, and also in their names. Portmanteau combinations such as, say, Gianfranco Kozlovič, are entirely common. And then there is a distinctive Istrian cuisine that represents both the northern Italian and southern Slav culinary traditions. The dish called *jota*, for example, is minestrone soup, with the addition of the Slavonic staple of pickled cabbage.

ROVINJ IS THE BEST PLACE to base yourself for a stay in Istria. Old Rovinj is a conical hill on a pear-shaped promontory. The harbour is full of bobbing boats, and the quay is lined with shuttered houses and long Victorian manufactories in shades of mustard, peach and terracotta. These buildings once constituted Croatia's main tobacco-processing plant: once you know that, every nicotine-coloured building looks like the tip of a pipe-smoker's tamping finger. The hill is a happily bewildering maze. There are lots of tiny restaurants, warmly lit and often no bigger than a front room. There is a dizzy collage of smells in the steep alleyways: hot cooking oil from the cheaper eateries, the sour chemical whiff of washing powder descending from the wet shirts hanging over the



'IN SUMMER HVAR IS A PARTY ISLAND – EVERYTHING
ABOUT IT SEEMS DESIGNED FOR PLEASURE'

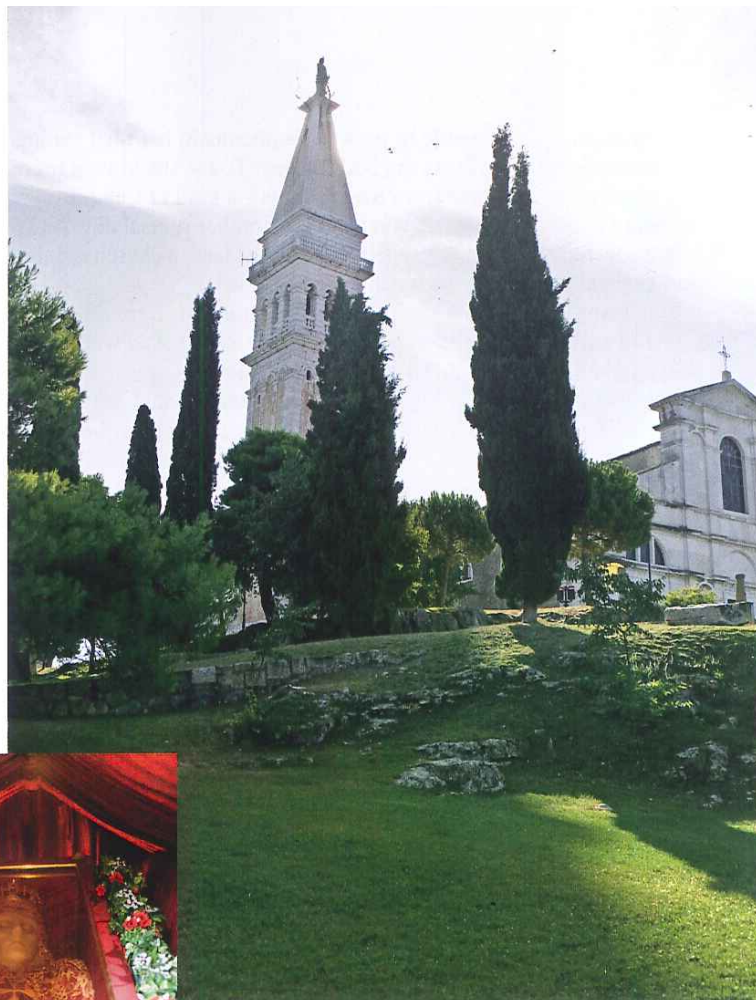


Hvar Town with the Pakleni islands beyond,
viewed from the Spanjola, a fortified
hilltop citadel built by Spanish engineers

street, the dark fruity aroma of a wine bar, the throat-catching reek of some Balkan brand of cigarette.

I happened to arrive on 15 September, the eve of the feast of St Euphemia, who is the patron saint of the town. As the sun dipped out of sight, the town came alive. An ethnic band called Batana (a *batana* is a traditional Istrian boat) was playing jolly songs on Tito Square. At the nearby harbourside there were ranks of stalls selling *pršut* (Istrian prosciutto) and freshly grilled sardines, and on the jetty rows of tables where winemakers from all over Istria stood proudly behind uncorked bottles. All you had to do was buy an empty wineglass and take it to whichever table caught your eye; here, in exchange for a cardboard token, the vintner would fill your glass to the brim. So for one evening only, the jetty became a cheerful open-air bodega. Everyone was enjoying the good weather and the good fellowship in the way that only a decent glass of red can engender, and I was reminded that wine is one of the first and best benefits of civilisation.

THE NEXT DAY, St Euphemia's Day, I went to St Euphemia's Church, which sits like a crown on the brow of the hill. The belltower is a copy of St Mark's in Venice, and on top there is a statue of the saint. It is mounted on ball-bearings so that she twists in the wind. Fishermen know that when Euphemia looks out to sea, it is time to go to work. The remains of St Euphemia herself are inside the church. Legend says that she was a Christian from Asia Minor, and was thrown to the lions in Constantinople. At first the lions would not touch her, but somehow her divine luck ran out and she died a grisly death. One day in the fourth century, Euphemia's marble sarcophagus miraculously washed up on the rocks below Rovinj's hill. A righteous little boy turned out to be the only person who could haul it ashore. The sarcophagus is now in a chapel at the back of the church. It has a metal flap at one end, like the door of a baker's oven. This was the one morning of the year when the door was



Left, the sarcophagus of St Euphemia, patron saint of Rovinj, which lies in Rovinj's Church of St Euphemia, above. Below, a happy arrival in Hvar marina

ISLAND ESCAPE: HVAR

The gimlet-shaped island of Hvar lies horizontally in the waters of the Adriatic Sea, its sharp end pointing like an accusing finger at the Dalmatian coast. It would be a short boat trip from the Croatian mainland to the easternmost spit of the island, but most visitors come by a longer route, on the ferry from Split. The ship departs from a jetty close to the walls of the magnificently megalomaniac Palace of Diocletian, so if the

timetable allows, take an hour or two to explore the glorious jumble of medieval streets inside the towering Roman walls. This is where the emperor came to live out his twilight years, after a long and successful career spent persecuting Christians. His retirement home was the size of a city – and now in effect it is the city, or its oldest quarter. Be sure not to give Split a miss: the memory of it will give you something to think

about during your lazy days on Hvar.

Part of the attraction of Hvar is that it can be reached only by water; there is no airport on the island. The crossing from Split takes just an hour, but somehow you feel that you have left the world behind as your ship rounds the thick end of Hvar's green wedge, and Hvar Town slips into view. The perfectly formed harbour is crowded with little sailing boats and large, blingy yachts. ➤



open, so it was possible to peek at Euphemia in her final resting place. Some people say the body is wax. To me she looked more like she was sculpted from frosted glass – a kind of Lalique martyr. I was the last person to see her on her special day. As I inspected that finely chiselled, translucent face, a church official came along, closed the hatch and locked it.

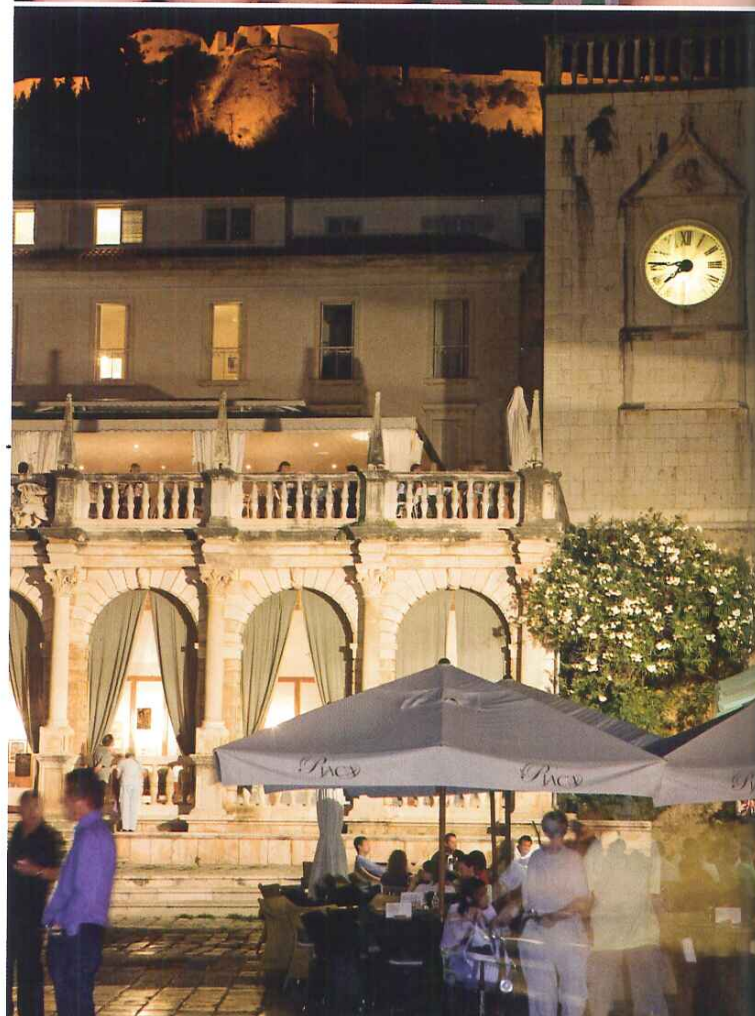
I went off to climb the church tower. It is 178 steps to the top, and each tread on the staircase is a worn and uneven wooden plank. You can see how far down it is by letting your focus drift from the next step (which is where your gaze should be) to the gaps between the steps (inadvisable). From the gallery below the bells you can look out over half the peninsula. The coastal stretch is known as Red Istria, because of the iron-rich soil. It is good country for olives and for the green Malvasia grape. Further inland is Grey Istria, also termed 'the heart of Istria'; this is truffle country. Deeper still inland is White Istria, so called for the bare limestone rocks or for the snow in the uplands. From here, atop St Euphemia, I could see Mount Vojak, the peak of Istria's highest mountain, Učka, presently snowless so far as I could tell.

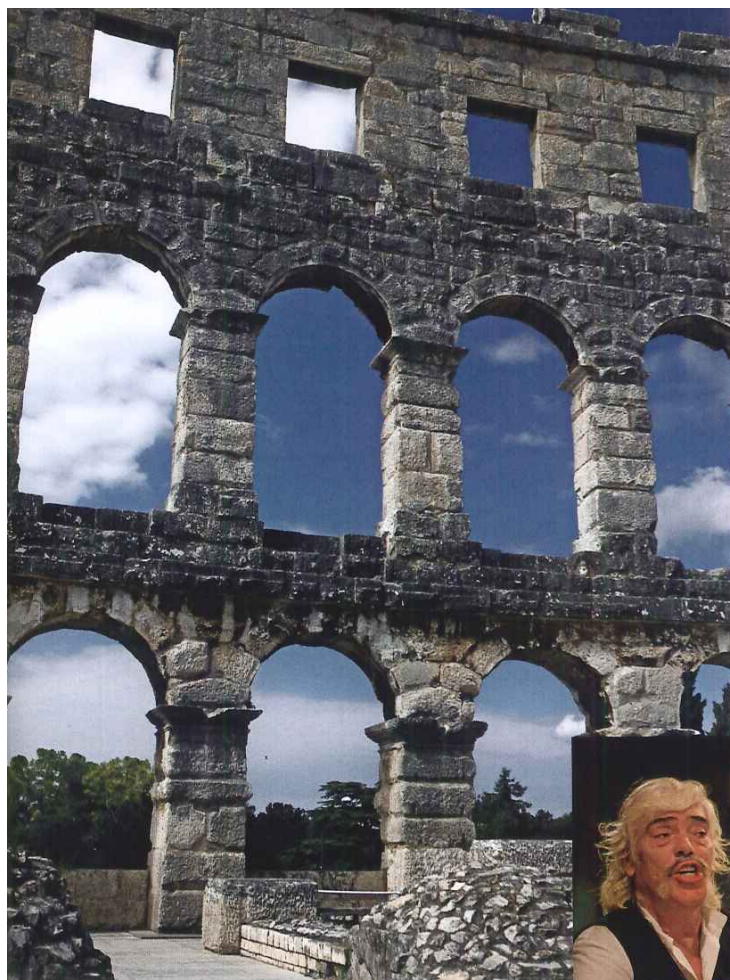
THE FOLLOWING MORNING I was planning on heading inland, but first I went to Pula, the largest town in Istria. Its main attraction is a vast amphitheatre dating from the first century BC, and it is the most spectacular of Pula's many Roman remains. The legacy of Rome is everywhere: I came across a complete mosaic, unsigned, in an alleyway behind a dentist's surgery. Locals complain that nothing ever gets built in Pula, because as soon as you start digging any kind of foundation you find some ancient floor or street, and all work has to stop while the archaeologists do their slow and painstaking work.

Apart from the amphitheatre, the most impressive Roman relic in Pula is the Golden Gate. This triumphal arch stands hard by the cafe Uliks ('Ulysses'), so named because in 1904 a struggling young writer named James Joyce spent a few months teaching English in the building, which then belonged to the Berlitz organisation. Joyce was not a great propagandist for the town or the region. He wrote in a letter home that Pula was 'a back-of-God-speed place, a naval Siberia', adding more generally: 'I hate this country with its hundred races and thousand languages. Istria is a long boring place wedged into the Adriatic, peopled by ignorant Slavs who wear little red caps and colossal breeches.' The only people wearing the caps and breeches now are folkies such as the Batana players. As for the rest of Joyce's diatribe, it was probably unfair then, and it is certainly untrue now.

From Pula I struck out north and east. The road that leads from the Red Istrian coast towards the Grey Istrian heartland is lined with olive groves. Along the way you quite often see little drystone igloos, shaped like old-fashioned beehives and about four feet tall. They are called *kažuns*, and they are shelters, a hundred years old or more, built as places where goatherds might take refuge from the hot Mediterranean sun. I had the air-con on full blast, and I was heading for the truffling woods – specifically for the village of Livade, where the largest truffle ever known was unearthed.

The man who discovered this world-conquering truffle is a restaurateur called Giancarlo Zigante. At his restaurant in Livade there is a golden cast of the 1.3kg fungus that made his name and his fortune: it looks like a gilded monkey brain. Alongside the cast is a framed Guinness Book of Records official certificate. Every year, on the anniversary of the find, a special truffle-based dinner is held at the restaurant. But





Above, the Roman amphitheatre in Pula, Istria. Above left, cocktail hour at Hula-Hula beach bar, Hvar Town. Left, The Palace hotel and restaurants on Trg Sveti Stjepana, Hvar Town



Above, a batana, a traditional-style Croatian boat, off Rovinj, Istria. Left, a Dalmatian musician performs in a restaurant in Hvar Town. Below left, outside the Cathedral of St Stjepan




➤ Bright, balmy sunshine bounces off the white limestone buildings, and is likely to cause snow blindness if you don't wear your shades.

The promenade where you disembark is called Obala Oslobođenja, or Liberty Quay, but goes under the mercifully brief nickname of Riva. Walk to the landward end and you find yourself on Trg Sveti Stjepana, or St Stephen's Square. It is the largest town square in Croatia: about as long as a football pitch and two-thirds as wide. One side is dominated by the Arsenal,

a covered boatbuilding yard left over from the years when Venice ruled this coast and all its islands. You can climb the staircase outside the Arsenal, and look down from a high veranda. From here you see that the square is not just big, it is also rather lovely. The two long sides of the piazza are lined with white shuttered limestone houses in the Venetian style. You would call them cottages if they were not so urbane and elegant, with their carved rooftop gables and their pretty Moorish windows.

Hvar is beautiful, and second only to Dubrovnik as a Dalmatian destination. In the summer months it is a party island, almost entirely given over to Europe's carefree youth. It's the St Tropez of the Adriatic, the Ibiza of Eastern Europe, and everything about the place seems designed for pleasure. Come September it gets a little more grown-up, but no less hedonistic. Early autumn is the time to go if you are over 30: the weather is still fine, the water warm, the music not quite so loud and viscerally rhythmic. You ➤



Leaping into the Adriatic from
Hula-Hula beach bar in Hvar Town

HIGHLIGHTS OF ISTRIA

WHERE TO STAY

● **Hotel Monte Mulini**

The only five-star hotel in Rovinj, a short walk round the bay. The rooms look out onto a screen of tall pines, the green finger of Zlatni Rt forest park and the soothing sea. There is a comfortable pool area and a well-appointed Wellness Centre. *A Smareglia, Rovinj, Istria* (00 385 52 636000; www.montemulinihotel.com). Doubles from €276

WHERE TO EAT

● **Wine Vault at Monte Mulini**

Top-class fine dining in the hotel crypt. The standout dish is sea bass Pierre Gagnaire; the fish is topped with tiny dice of apple, and sits on potato crème raked in neat furrows like the gravel in a Zen garden. *Dinner for two about 1,200 kuna (£140) without wine*

● **Kantinon**

By far the best of the fish restaurants around Rovinj harbour, and excellent value too. The meat is as good as the fish, the atmosphere is brisk, and the lighting is blinding. *17 Obala Aldo Rissmondo* (00 385 52 816075). *Dinner for two about £35*

● **Zigante Tartufi**

Truffle-specialist restaurant and shop (see main copy). *7 Livade* (00 385 52 664 030; www.zigantetartufi.com). *Five-course menu, about £70 per person*

● **Mondo Konoba**

A small family restaurant below the imposing walls of Motovun. It's a good place to sample truffle dishes if Zigante is too overwhelming. Try scrambled eggs with black truffles, and beefsteak with walnut sauce. *1 Barbacan* (00 385 52 681 791). *Dinner for two about €40*

WHERE TO DRINK

● **Viećia Batana**

The oldest café in Rovinj, and the best place for a mid-morning break. The coffee is excellent, the terrace is lightly perfumed with cigarette smoke, and the view is of the busy harbour and the bustling square. *8 Trg Maršala Tito, Rovinj*

● **Veli Jože**

A jolly nautical bar that looks like a joint venture between Jules Verne and Captain Hook, filled to the brim with maritime bric-à-brac such as deep-sea diver suits and bits of ship. A good spot for a pre-prandial beer. *1 Sveti Križa, Rovinj*

● **Kaya Energy Bar & Gallery**

Cool, dark café-bar with a hippyish vibe in the picturesque mountain town of Grožnjan. Stop off for a drink once you've done the galleries. *Vincenta iz Kastva 2, Grožnjan*

WHAT TO DO

● **Go on the art trail in Grožnjan**

In summer the town turns into an artists' retreat. Almost every cottage is a gallery or studio, and music wafts from the windows. Walk the cobbled streets, catch an open-air performance and buy art and craft.

● **Catch the ferry to Crveni Otok**

'Red Island' is a ferry hop from Rovinj. The beaches are good (but sometimes crowded), and there is a fabulous restaurant, Lanterna, in a ruined 19th-century folly. After lunch take a stroll in the woods.

● **Walk the walls of Motovun**

The town of Motovun clings to the mountain across the Mirna valley from Grožnjan. From its battlements you look down on vines where the Teran grape grows in regimented ranks. Go in the evening, and watch the sun set on the distant Adriatic.

even on an ordinary night, every dish on Zigante's menu (with the possible exception of the coffee) contains white or black truffle in some form. There is marinated steak with shaved white truffle, homemade pasta with black truffle, pear and truffle cream, truffle ravioli, truffle ice cream, lamb cutlets with truffle mousse. At the shop next door you can buy truffle cheese, truffle sausage, truffle schnapps.

I decided to give the five-course set menu a miss. It cost 625 kuna (about £70) a pop, and I couldn't be sure I liked truffles quite that much. Instead I headed into the nearby forest to meet a truffle-hunter named Ivica Kalcic. He works with dogs, and over the years has dug up tons of the precious fungus. 'In the 1980s I could get a kilo and a half in a day,' he said. 'It's less now, but I can still say that I built my house on truffles.'

Dogs, like the pigs they use in the Périgord, are crazy about truffles. Unlike pigs, they happily settle for the measly reward of a biscuit when they find one.

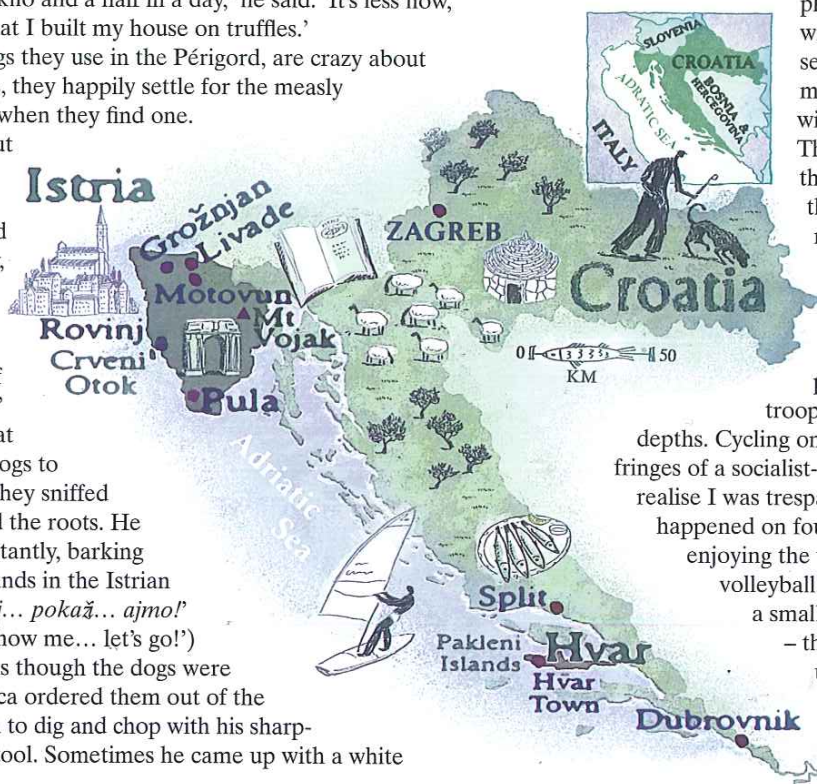
Ivica has 40 dogs but on this hunting trip he brought two: a serious, experienced spaniel called Jacky, and a bounding, tongue-lolling labrador called Uča. 'In a couple of years he'll be good,' said Ivica, winking at Uča. Ivica led the dogs to likely trees, where they sniffed and snuffled around the roots. He talked to them constantly, barking out staccato commands in the Istrian dialect: 'Išči... čekaj... pokaž... ajmo!' ('Search... wait... show me... let's go!')

When it looked as though the dogs were onto something, Ivica ordered them out of the way and knelt down to dig and chop with his sharp-edged entrenching tool. Sometimes he came up with a white

truffle, like a grubby pebble, sometimes with a black one, pitted and misshapen like the rotting remains of a golf ball. He tucked the booty into his knapsack, and when he moved away from the freshly dug root, the dogs crowded in to rub their wet noses in the soil, where the pungent, musky aroma they love still lingered.

THAT EVENING, BACK IN ROVINJ, I borrowed a bicycle and pedalled off round Zlatni Rt, 'Golden Cape', the coastal nature reserve beyond the town. It is not golden at all but green as green, and filled with a studied variety of trees – cypresses, pines, cedars – all of them planted a century ago by an Austro-Hungarian count named Baron Hütteroth. In some

places the forest looks pretty wild and you lose sight of the sea altogether; in others it feels more like a municipal garden with lawns and park benches. There was little sound apart from the birds' early evensong and the crunch of gravel beneath my wheels. Occasionally I came across a little herd of bikes leaning against trees, apparently abandoned, but then I'd spot a group of picnickers eating silently, like a troop of gorillas, away in the green depths. Cycling on and on, I found myself on the fringes of a socialist-era resort complex. I didn't realise I was trespassing on a nudist camp until I happened on four uninhibited holidaymakers enjoying the traditional naturist sport of volleyball. Just before this, I had passed a small dog – a Yorkshire terrier – that greeted me by lifting itself up on its front paws and doing a perfect handstand. I'm not sure which was the more startling sight. 11



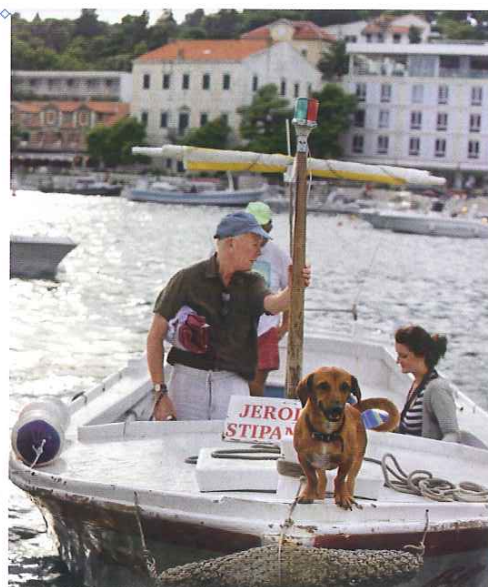
► can drink cocktails in the golden evening light without having to hunt for a table, you can still sunbathe on one of the gorgeous Pakleni islands, and it is far easier to hire a boat.

The Riviera feel of Hvar is as much about the kinds of people who visit as the character of the island and its climate. Eva Longoria celebrated her wedding anniversary in Hvar, at a private do in the citadel that keeps a benign watch over the harbour. Local tennis hero Goran Ivanišević is a regular at Carpe Diem, the

hip bar that is strategically located steps away from where the big sea-going yachts moor. Gwyneth Paltrow has been seen out for lunch on Groda, the narrow restaurant-filled street just behind the main square. Hvar Town, already pretty chic, can only get more fashionable now that there are two top-drawer hotels, the Adriana and the Riva, on either side of the harbour. Adriana, on the west side, gets the morning sun, and its big windows make the most of that. Its colours are cool greys and whites, and on top of the

hotel is a terrific bar with deep, U-shaped armchairs next to an indoor swimming pool. Riva, on the east side of the harbour, sits right in the middle of the most lively part of town. You can take your breakfast on the pavement, and watch the happy new arrivals getting off the boat. The vibe at Riva is younger and louder than at Adriana, and its interior is slightly self-consciously risqué. The corridors are decorated with lifesize prints of charcoal nudes, and in the bar are huge

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TAKE A SHINE TO CROATIA

Continued from page 97

➤ black-and-white film-stills of 1950s starlets in slips and petticoats, the postwar Hollywood code for nudity. Here on the wall was Elizabeth Taylor *en déshabillé*, alongside Brigitte Bardot and, slightly unexpectedly, Diana Dors.


The sea off Hvar is always busy with speedboats, windsurfers, little dinghies with sails shaped like toucans' beaks. There are fleets of watertaxis that ply to and fro between the harbour and the offshore Pakleni Islands. This is where you go if you want to lie on a beach, as there is precious little space for that on Hvar itself.

Gališnik, the smallest and nearest, was once a prison island, a kind of sunny Alcatraz. It was abandoned for many years under Communism, and became, one person told me, 'like the island of Sleeping Beauty, because it was overgrown with thorns'. After Croatian independence, a student group took it upon itself to clear the thorns and restore Gališnik to life. No princess was found at the time, but the pop princess Beyoncé has since hired the island for the enjoyment of herself and her many courtiers. The large island of Sveti Klement is quiet even when the town is heaving: there are enough secluded fjordlets, wooded glades and pebbly beaches for everyone. The little islet of Jerolim is set aside for the use of naturalists. The Pakleni islands are also a

playground for hobby sailors: if you know your ropes, you can hire a boat and explore the winding ins and outs of them. Local fishermen will tell you stories about the winds: the violent, rain-filled *bura* that rolls down off the Velebit mountains; and the suffocating *jugo* that descends on Hvar like periodic bouts of fever. The *jugo* is nothing other than the Italian sirocco, blowing in from the Sahara carrying heat and dust. People here hate it, and not just the sea-going ones. 'The *jugo* drives you crazy,' one islander told me, an immigrant from mainland Croatia. 'In olden times there was a law that none of the governors of Hvar were allowed to make important decisions during the days of the *jugo*. I thought that was silly when I first came here, but now I know why: the *jugo* makes it impossible to work, impossible to think.'

But sun, not wind, is the island's meteorological default. Islanders proudly tell you that Hvar gets more hours of sunshine a year on average than anywhere else in the Mediterranean, and they'll put a figure on it too: 2,718. The people of Hvar are inordinately fond of this statistic. There is a very tasty local wine that goes under the rather cumbersome but appealing name of '2718 Sat Sunci U Boci', which translates as '2718 Hours of Sunshine in a Bottle'. Wine is the island's passion, and the godfather

of winemakers on Hvar is a man named Andro Tomić. He was one of the first producers to become established here, and he is very proud of the fact that some of his wines have been awarded international medals. I met him at the Hvar Wine Festival, a night of Teran reds and Malvasia whites enjoyed beneath the cavernous ribbed vault of the Arsenal. With his big white beard and patrician air, Tomić looks like a Greek titan: Neptune in a velvet jacket and a cravat. He knows his striking looks are part of his appeal, and his own profile appears like an Athenian bas-relief on all his labels. 'Wine should be drunk by the hour, not by the bottle,' said Tomić. I asked him what he meant. 'I simply mean that when you drink, you should go about it slowly and gently,' he said, in heavily accented French. 'I like the fact that in some countries they mix their wine with water. That is as it should be.'

We tasted one of his own award-winners together, a Plavac Mali red. 'C'est pas dur, c'est rond,' he declared ('It's not harsh, it's rounded') – and he was quite right, though he said it himself. Mr Tomić's 'wine studio', near Jelsa on the north side of the island, is open to visitors, and is well worth the trip – particularly since most Croatian winemakers are too small ever to find their way onto our supermarket shelves. If you want the taste of Hvar, your only option is to go to Hvar. 

HIGHLIGHTS OF HVAR

WHERE TO STAY

- **Riva** (See main story.) Riva (00 385 21 750100; www.suncanihvar.com). Doubles from £99
- **Adriana** (See main story.) Fabrika (00 385 21 750200; www.suncanihvar.com). Doubles from €99

WHERE TO EAT

- **Pizzeria Kogo** No-nonsense Italian on the main square. The 35-kuna (about £4) set breakfast includes 'scrumbled eggs'. Trg Sveti Stjepana (00 385 21 742136). Dinner for two about £23 without wine
- **Zlatna Školjka** The 'Golden Shell' is Hvar's slow-food restaurant, and probably the best place to sample Dalmatian cuisine. Try the sirloin of beef with goat's cheese and capers. 8 Petar Hektorovića (00 385 98 168 8797). Dinner for two about £70
- **Hula-Hula** Hula-Hula bar, on the coast path beyond Hotel Amfora, is famous for its beach parties, and for its 'snack tower': a barbecue served on a three-tier cake stand. About £20 for two

WHERE TO DRINK


- **Carpe Diem** The coolest bar on Hvar. A great place for a nightcap, and the best place to spot any celebs in town. Riva (00 385 21 742 369; www.carpe-diem-hvar.com)
- **Palace Hotel** The terrace on the loggia is a great place to sit and watch people on the square below. Get there early for a cocktail in a prime spot. Trg Sveti Stjepana (www.suncanihvar.com)
- **Caffe Gromit** Named for the animated dog, who stares balefully

out of the extensive drinks menu of this café-bar on the harbour. It is snazzier than that makes it sound: drop in for a morning coffee to see it at its best.

WHAT TO DO

- **Hire a boat** If you want to get to the Pakleni Islands under your own steam, or just sunbathe offshore, there are plenty of small boats for hire in the harbour. Prices vary so shop around.
- **Go to Stari Grad** The quiet, charming former capital is on the north coast; visit the restful summer house of 16th-century poet Petar Hektorović.
- **Hike up to the Spanjola** It's a steep but enjoyable walk up to the fortress, and the view is wonderful, especially at sunset.

WEATHER TO GO

 April to October is warm and sunny in Croatia, but it can get very busy in July and August.

GETTING THERE

EasyJet (www.easyjet.com) flies to Split from Gatwick and Bristol.

Croatia Airlines (www.croatiaairlines.com) flies from Heathrow to Split.

Seasons (01244 202000; www.seasons.co.uk) offers an eight-night bespoke itinerary that combines four nights at Hotel Monte Mulini in Rovinj and four nights in Hvar at the Adriana. From £1,495 per person, including flights, B&B accommodation and nine days' car hire.

 **Journey time:** About two-and-a-half hours' flight from London to Split, then an hour's boat ride to Hvar, or about five hours' drive to Rovinj, Istria.