

Dubrovnik

George Bernard Shaw was enchanted by this beautiful city, about which he said "those who seek paradise on Earth should come to Dubrovnik and see Dubrovnik", as well as, famously, describing it as "the pearl of the Adriatic". Dubrovnik truly is a stunning city with its amazing Old Town, which became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979.

But whatever we and others say, our words do not give justice to this dazzling place. So come soon and see it with your own eyes!

As mentioned, the Old Town and its many sights (including the well-preserved city walls along which you can walk) is the main sight of Dubrovnik. If you are visiting in the summer, do not miss the world-renowned Dubrovnik Summer Festival, with music, theatre and dance performances.



The main history of Dubrovnik usually concentrates on a small settlement on the site of Dubrovnik in pre-historic times; this settlement, in fact, was on an island called Laus which was, at that time, separated from the mainland by a marsh. There was also a larger Greek settlement nearby in what was called Epidauros (present-day Cavtat). An invasion by Slavs in the 7th century destroyed Epidauros and other communities in the area, causing inhabitants to flee to Laus. Laus eventually changed to Raus which in turn became Ragusa - which is the historic name for Dubrovnik. Around this time, Dubrovnik itself was founded by Croats (the name stemming from *dub* which means oak and *dubrava* which means wood - unsurprisingly, the settlement was by a oak forest). Ragusa and Dubrovnik eventually merged when the marshland between them was filled in. Another theory about Dubrovnik's history which is gaining weight is that there was in fact a large Greek settlement where Dubrovnik is situated today and that the city in fact has Greek origins.

With over 1,000 kilometres of coastline, it is no wonder that there's many, many beaches in Croatia! In fact, one of the wonderful things about the coastline is that almost any little space alongside the sea is suitable for bathing, swimming and relaxing on, no matter how small. Some of the beauty of Croatia's beaches can also be found in their surroundings - adjacent to crops of trees or vegetation, close to picturesque harbours, or overlooked by stunning scenery means being on a Croatian beach is a great experience!

One of the main things to point out is that the vast majority of beaches in Croatia are pebble beaches. There are some sandy beaches in the country, but these are few and far between -

and also tend to get very busy during high season because every seems to clamour for sandy beaches!

Of course, pebble beaches are no bad thing. The lack of sand means that the waters are often considerably clearer, which adds to the beauty of the Adriatic. One tip, however - make sure you either wear flip flops to the beach (and walk with them to the edge of the water, before wading/diving in) or buy or bring along a pair of water shoes. This latter tip may be especially true for children, who might find it harder to walk on the pebbles. Water shoes will also help if you've been a bit more adventurous and have stumbled across a rocky little cove or similar.



Zlatni Rat Beach in Bol, on the island of Brac

Back in the "old days", hotels in Croatia would often claim to have their own beach. More often than not, this constituted a bit of concrete from which you could dive off into the sea. Whilst this undoubtedly provided great, direct access to the sea, it was hardly the kind of place to laze around on all day!

If your hotel doesn't quite have the beach facilities you were after - and this is true for whatever kind of accommodation you stay in - DO check out other beaches in the town/resort, don't just frequent the nearest! DO also feel free to ask your accommodation host about tips on good local beaches. Finally, DO also consider taking a day trip to a local island (if possible!) to find a beach with a change of pace or scene (e.g. Lokrum island or the Elafiti islands for Dubrovnik; Sveti Nikola for Porec; even the larger islands in Dalmatia for resorts there).

Beaches in Croatia - Water Quality

Croatia's beaches and its water, overall, are very well kept, maintained and monitored. The Blue Flag programme, which awards the a prestigious blue flag for one year at a time to beaches and marinas that meet certain requirements (water quality, environmental management, safety, services provided), has regularly awarded a great number of Croatia's beaches with a flag - these are proudly hoisted up before the start of each summer season.

For the 2012 season, 106 beaches were awarded a Blue Flag, alongside 18 of Croatia's marinas. You can search for the full list on the Blue Flag website (see its Croatia section) which gives useful information about all the beaches. More information can also be found at the website of the Croatian Blue Flag representative organisation - named Lijepa Nasa - although it is in Croatian only.

Another very useful online tool is the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction's (pew - that's a long name!) bathing water quality webpage. You will see

that the water at the vast majority of beaches is rated excellent; a handful as good; very few as sufficient; and in fact NO beaches were rated poor. Use the website to search for beaches; the site also has helpful photos of beaches and their facilities/surroundings, so you can get a feel for each.

The Croatian coastline is perfect for sailing holidays. With so many islands and ports, you can stop as many times as you like or sail for as long as you wish. With over 1,000 islands, sailing holidays can provide an excellent way of seeing some of the smaller (perhaps even uninhabited!) islands that would otherwise be difficult to visit with scheduled ferry lines. This can be considered to be more "hands-on" than your usual holiday, although everyone from beginners to more experienced sailors can find something suitable for them.



Sailing holidays generally either consist of a course or the chartering of a boat, with or without a skipper. Courses can range from beginner level through to those wishing to brush up their skills (and where better to do that than through the beautiful Croatian Adriatic waters and islands?) at intermediate or advanced levels.