

## Zagreb



*Zagreb's main square - Trg Ban Jelacic (and the statue of him too)*

Prague and Budapest are the most popular cities in Central Europe for foreign visitors. But these two now have a competitor in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia - which, let us reassure you, is a dazzling place.

Zagreb's history stretches as far back as 1094 when two Hungarian settlements in the area emerged: Kaptol and Gradec. In 1242, both settlements were destroyed by Mongols. Rebuilt, Kaptol and Gradec underwent a period of bitter rivalry but were finally united - somewhat unwillingly - against an advance by the Turks. The name *Zagreb* first emerged in the 16th century to describe the two settlements, and the *sabor* (the Croatian parliament) also emerged during this time. It was in 1557 that Zagreb was first mentioned as a capital and in 1621 the city was picked to become the seat of Croatian viceroys. After some misfortune in the 17th and 18th centuries down to (amongst other things) plague and fire, which even saw the parliament move to Varazdin, Zagreb once again rose to prominence in the 19th century. A number of buildings and institutions of cultural significance were built, including the University in 1874 and the national theatre in 1890. Railway lines were also constructed - prompting significant expansion in the *Donji Grad* (Lower Town) - and gasworks and waterworks were also built around this time.



*Aerial view of Zagreb*

In the early part of the 20th century, Zagreb grew even more quickly. A number of residential neighbourhoods emerged and expanded, which saw the population of Zagreb increase by 70% during the 1920s, with the city growing further after World War II when new areas such as *Novi Zagreb* (literally meaning *New Zagreb*) were created. An industrial area was also established in 1949 and Zagreb's Pleso Airport opened in 1962. During the time of former Yugoslavia, Zagreb was an important city in the country - by population, it was the second largest in Yugoslavia (behind Belgrade) and was considered the economic centre of the country. In 1991, when Croatia declared independence, the city became capital of Croatia. Although it was hit a few times during the resulting war, the city emerged relatively unscathed and there's no lingering evidence. These days, Zagreb is a bustling city with many sights, museums, galleries, bars and restaurants, and not forgetting the all important "cafe society" - Zagreb is home to many a cafe which almost always seem to be entirely full with locals! The city is well worth a visit, whether on a city break or as part of a longer holiday combined with Croatia's coastal delights.