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Dubrovnik's Old Town as seen from the port

Dalmatian dazzler



With its spectacular historic buildings, Mediterranean climate and crystal clear waters, Dubrovnik was Byron's 'pearl of the Adriatic'. For Alison Baycock, this Croatian jewel has everything needed for a memorable holiday.

1. Walk around the Old Town walls

If you take in only one tourist attraction in Dubrovnik, it must be the city walls. At up to 82 feet high and 39 feet wide and dotted with towers and crenellations, these are possibly the best preserved and most impressive fortifications of their kind still in existence. Built between the eighth and 16th centuries, the walls completely surround Dubrovnik's small but exquisite Old Town and provide a wonderful vantage point to view the creamy, terracotta-roofed buildings and sparkling blue Adriatic. The whole circuit is 1.2 miles and takes about an hour.

2. Drink from Onofrio's Great Fountain

The monumental Great Fountain is located just inside Dubrovnik's main Pile gate – to prevent disease, visitors were required to use it to wash before they entered the city. It is one of two elaborate fountains built in the 15th century by Neapolitan Onofrio della Cava to supply water from a source 12 miles away.

3. Take a boat trip to the islands

Make time to visit at least one of the many islands strung along the Dalmatian coast. The nearest is Lokrum, a 15-minute boat ride from the Old Town. With its ruined fort, sub-tropical flora and fauna and warm salt-water lake, it makes a perfect place to get away from it all. A little further away are the Elaphite islands – Koločep, Lopud and Sipan. They all have few, if any, cars, and are only sparsely populated.

4. Sample the local wine and beer

Croatia has an ideal wine-growing climate and produces some extremely drinkable wines. The local reds are particularly good. Croatian beer is good value and an excellent antidote to the Mediterranean sun.

5. Go shopping in the Old Town

There are no cars in Dubrovnik's Old Town, so strolling along its polished marble walkways and winding in and out of the narrow, shady streets is an absolute pleasure. The area is best known for its embroidery and lace work, leather crafts and jewellery. You will also find stylish clothes – including ties, which were invented in Croatia – and quality designer crafts. If you want to see where the locals shop, go down to the market at Gruz harbour, which is a riot of colour and activity.



The rugged coastline of Babib Kuk

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Onofrio's fountain

'Dubrovnik's scorching summer temperatures and crystal clear waters will make a day at the beach almost impossible to resist'

6. Take in some Croatian culture

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a history that goes back more than 1,000 years, the Old Town is very much the jewel in Dubrovnik's crown – and, like its surrounding walls, it has been painstakingly restored since the wars that led to the break-up of the Yugoslav state.

But the city also boasts a number of additional attractions – from museums housed in palatial Venetian-Gothic buildings to art galleries, an aquarium and 48 churches. The city's Cathedral Treasury houses more than 100 priceless relics, including the remains of Saint Blaise's head, carried triumphantly around town every 3 February.

7. Try a Dalmatian speciality

A trip to Dubrovnik would not be complete without at least one traditional Dalmatian meal. The seafood is especially delicious and good value. But if fish and shellfish don't appeal, try one of the regional meat dishes, such as steak or veal in a rich, flavoursome sauce. Best served al fresco with an ice cold beer or glass of wine.

8. Explore the Babin Kuk peninsulas

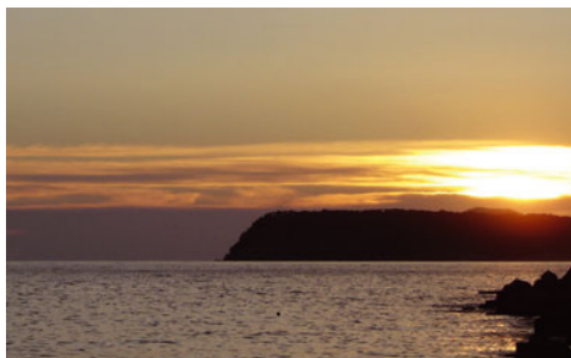
Dubrovnik has two beautiful peninsulas, Babin Kuk and Lapad, both of which have cool, wooded hillsides and rugged coastlines. A walk around either will reward you with spectacular sea views, but the longer journey around Babin Kuk will offer additional panoramas of the Elaphite islands and Croatian mainland, as well as Gruz harbour with its numerous boats. There are several excellent beaches along the way.

9. Spend a day at the beach

Dubrovnik's scorching summer temperatures and crystal waters will make a day at the beach almost impossible to resist. There is a beach to suit every taste – from quiet, sheltered coves and Italian-style lidos to bigger developments with games and watersports. If you fancy getting an all over tan, Lokrum has the area's only official naturist beach.

10. Watch the sun set over the Adriatic

Dalmatian sunsets are spectacular, not least because they seem to be exceptionally fast. There is nothing better than sitting in a beachfront bar and watching a blood-red sun sinking into the sea – preferably while you're savouring a glass of good Croatian wine.



Croatian sunset over Uvala Bay

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