

POSH CRUISING WEEKEND IN CROATIA

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The islands of Split offer the very definition of getting away from it all

If money is no object, fly to Split and charter an 80ft teak Gulet to cruise Croatia's Dalmatian coastline and its archipelago of unspoilt islands

FRIDAY

Leaving Split behind, head south towards Brac where vineyards and centuries-old olive groves sit alongside fragrant pine woods. Throughout Brac, the mixed heritage is palpable with Roman and Christian landmarks scattered on the island, such as Blaca's breathtaking 16th-century Hermitage monastery at the foot of tall, steep cliffs. But, rocky Brac's claim to fame is its limestone, which has been used in landmark buildings across the world, such as the White House in Washington DC.

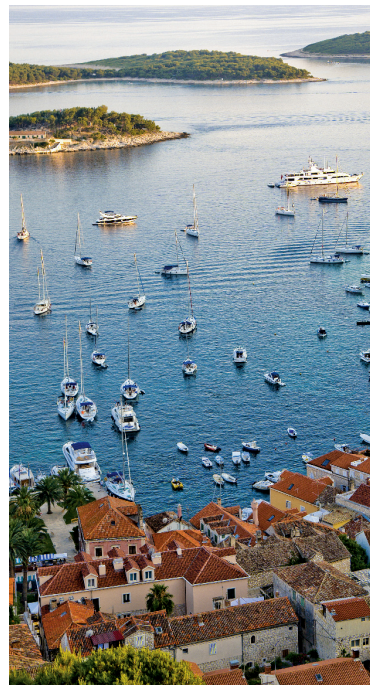
If monasteries and limestone don't float

your boat, Brac also has gorgeous beaches stretching over 10km, including 'Zlatni rat' known as the Golden Horn, near Bol in the south. The oldest town on the coast, Bol oozes Croatian spirit with its trademark winding streets, red rooftops and busy squares. It's the ideal place to catch the famous Dalmatian 'a capella' street concerts. As night falls, dine at Ribarska Kucica (tel: 385 (0)21 635 033 www.ribarska-kucica.com) on the sea promenade between Bol centre and the Dominican monastery. Then set sail overnight, south to Hvar, the Dalmatian coast's answer to St Tropez.

SATURDAY

Experience an exotic, balmy world of palms, oversized aloe cacti, lavender fields and lemon trees in Hvar's subtropical climate.

Hvar Town's beautifully preserved medieval harbor embraces modern life. Hip hotels and stylish restaurants blend in with stunning Venetian buildings and the 13th-century weapon storage. In season, the narrow port is bursting with megayachts and royalty, from the real thing (Prince Charles) to modern contenders (the Beckhams). Stop for lunch at the ultra sleek Roots restaurant (www.suncahvar.com). >



Clockwise from here.
In Hvar Town, enjoy the spa at the Adriana Hotel; Zlatni Rat or Golden Horn in Brač; Hvar harbour; seafood risotto



com), and while away the afternoon sipping champagne on the gorgeous terrace. To experience one of the natural wonders of the area, sail off to the 'Crvene Stijene' eight kilometres east of Hvar to see the 'Red Rocks' sprouting from the sea bed. Or, for a touch of pampering, hit the Sensori spa at the Adriana Hotel (www.suncanihar.com), a slinky boutique hotel, with its own rooftop pool and nightclub. At sunset, head to St Klement, across the bay, one of the 'Pakleni otoci' islands where the low-key beaches are awash with crystal clear waters and (be warned!) the odd nudist.

For dinner, moor up at Zori (tel: +385 (0)21 718 231), a well-kept secret in the area. With its palm-fringed terrace and twinkling lights, it's the place to sample fresh grilled lobster with a glass of island-made wine in a fairytale atmosphere.

SUNDAY

After hectic Hvar, venture on to Vis, dubbed the 'Cradle of Life' because the first signs of life on the island date way back to the fourth century BC. And, it appears, little has changed since. Nature rules supreme – it's a snorkelling paradise and the shimmering blue waters are full of hidden treasure. Discover the sunken ships and protected marine life, or laze on the sheltered beaches, before sampling the incredible fresh seafood risotto served up by Luce, the owner of Val Restaurant (1 Don C. Marasovica, tel: +385 (0)21 711 763) on the palm-shaded terrace.

Then spend the afternoon cruising around Svetac, Jabuka and Palagruza. These islands are mostly uninhabited aside from a few sheep grazing and are perfect for a little relaxing solitude. Svetac is only four square kilometres and has an iliric

fortress and Jabuka is basically inaccessible volcanic rock, 97m high. Palagruza features a lighthouse dating back to 1875. Before setting sail back to Split, make a quick detour southwest to the tiny island of Bisevo. Of its many caves, the must-see is the Modra spilja, also known as the Blue cave, which is only accessible by boat. Leap into the limpid waters and watch as the light filters onto the cave walls and white sandy floor, bathing you in an incredible silver blue glow. A little like the islands themselves – it's a look into another world. Visit www.dalmatiandestinations.com (tel: +44 (0)207 730 8007) for cruise prices

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