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# Postcards

SPRING 2013

## CROATIA *is* CALLING!

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ROMANTIC  
GETAWAY:**  
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HEATS UP**

# ON THE ADRIATIC WATERFRONT

Jessica Colley explores Croatia and Montenegro's ancient cities and discovers their many charms.



A panoramic view of Dubrovnik



It could have been any morning over the last 1,000 years. At this early hour—when streets are empty and the only movement is slowly creeping shadows—the ancient walled city of Dubrovnik looks as it has for centuries. Stone fortresses and red rooftops pop against the bright hue of the Adriatic Sea, a scene that has enchanted travelers since they first began to arrive. From a balcony overlooking the old city gates, I watched Dubrovnik slumber, and slowly wake.

In a time where cities can change dramatically in a month or year, I was drawn to Dubrovnik. While guards no longer stand watch against invaders on the imposing city wall, the bones of this city remain unchanged. My trip began at the Hilton Imperial Dubrovnik, where 100 meters from the old town gates, I caught my first glimpse of the city that has inspired writers, artists and lovers for generations. After hearing all the hype, I traveled to Dubrovnik to witness the city's charms firsthand.

### **SLOWING DOWN IN DUBROVNIK**

Some visitors spend one hour total in Dubrovnik, walking from one end of the old town to the other in a whirlwind tour, but my goal was to spend longer than that on a cup of coffee.

Passing through the gates of the walled city onto marble streets, I surveyed the café scene. The perfect table would be a shady spot where I could people watch and read the newspaper. One table caught my eye. While I waited for my coffee, locals emerged at the bottom of steep flights of stairs to run errands. The elderly had a remarkable spring in their step, possibly from a lifetime of exercise, climbing the city's countless staircases.

When my cup was empty I set out for Dubrovnik's top attraction: the ancient wall surrounding the old town. I climbed stairs onto the 1.2-mile wall, stretching around the city's perimeter, complete with forts, towers and lookout points. Strolling along, it was impossible not to peak into kitchens where grandmothers stood over a bubbling pot or peer down into gardens where children played. The scenery was so inspiring that it seemed to demand heavy conversation. Teens around me swapped big questions: what single thing will make your life meaningful? What do you think true happiness means?

After completing the circular route, I was eager to explore the streets I had seen from above. I wandered through markets, marveling at local women switch from Italian to French to English to coincide with the language of the customer. I browsed through jewelry shops, admiring coral creations. For an extra dose of history, I visited the 14th century Franciscan monastery, complete with an old pharmacy museum showcasing potions and old doctors' logs. Because history in Dubrovnik must also have function, the pharmacy is a still-operating drugstore.

When the sun began to set and my stomach to rumble, I took a seat at a waterfront restaurant and ordered a big pot of mussels. I ate them slowly, using dense local bread to soak up flavorful juices, and watched as the sun sank into the sea.

### **A LAUNCHING POINT IN CROATIA**

This walled city on the Adriatic might be the most popular destination in Croatia, but it isn't necessarily the most striking. In the waterfront city of Split, the magnificent ruins of Roman Emperor Diocletian's palace date back to 295 AD.

No trip to Croatia would be complete without boarding a boat for one of the country's 1,185 islands, such as Hvar, with its

mountaintop fortress, the perfect place to order a cold beer and watch boats buzz in and out of the harbor below. In the capital city of Zagreb, an efficient tram system makes it easy to explore museums, parks and the Medieval district.

***How to Go:** Trafalgar offers tours with a specialization in the history and culture of the region.*

### **BEYOND CROATIA'S BORDERS**

Stepping foot into Dubrovnik raised a question: what other historic cities are waiting along the Adriatic? To find out, I crossed the border of Croatia into Montenegro. Croatia might get more attention from travelers, but Montenegro has ancient monasteries, snowy mountains, quiet beaches and fewer crowds. Some of the best things to see here include the peaceful Ostrog Monastery, the Bay of Kotor with its dramatic limestone cliffs and the Tara Canyon where you can go rafting between kilometer-high walls.

After a 75-mile, 2-hour drive along the Adriatic, I arrived in Budva, a center of culture and main destination in Montenegro that dates back to the 5th century BC. Mediterranean architecture and red rooftops abound here too, but before exploring stone churches I wanted to hit the beach. The best time to visit Montenegro is from April through October, with July and August being the busiest months. Try September, when the sandy beaches will be peaceful but there is still some heat in the sun's rays.

I grabbed a towel and set off for Mogren, a famous beach located between cliffs, reached by a 500-meter pathway from the old town. I settled into the sand, thinking all of the Medieval city's cultural attractions—its outdoor theater, fortress walls and 15th century citadel—could wait one more day to be seen.

***How to Go:** Abercrombie & Kent offers immersive trips into Montenegro, focusing on the local culture.*

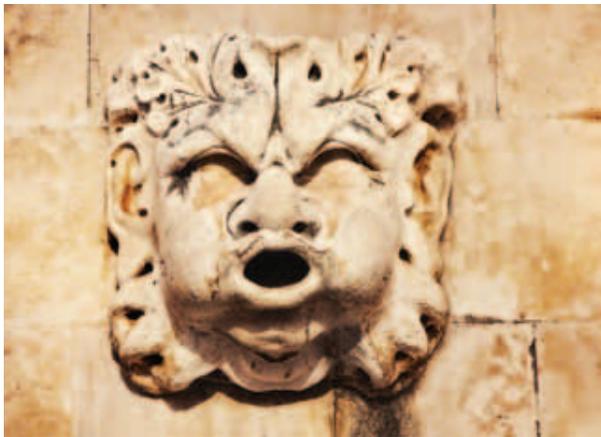
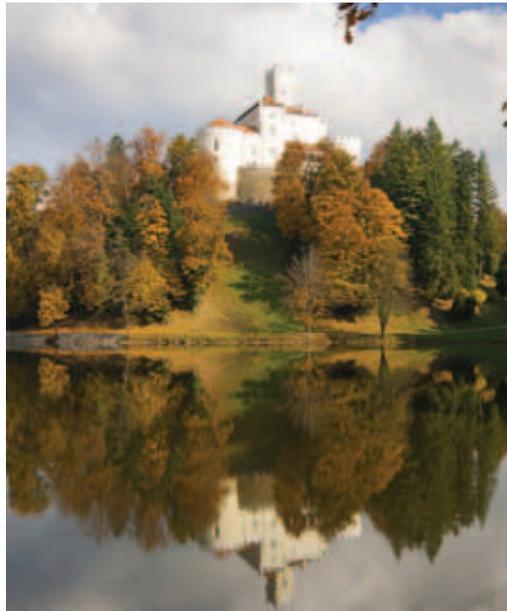
### **ALONG THE ADRIATIC BY NIGHT**

The walled cities of Croatia and Montenegro have different character by night. When groups of visitors have gone, the streets are returned to locals. One night in Dubrovnik, bright moonlight illuminated the old town streets. During an after dinner stroll, I heard the faint strum of a guitar. Rounding a corner, I found three musicians, playing to a small group. One by one people started to dance, right in the middle of the moonlit square, unaware, or at least not caring, about pairs of eyes watching imperfect steps. I stood back to watch, but when a senior citizen with a mop of white hair extended his hand for a dance, I couldn't say no. **TL**

**Call your Travel Leaders agent to book your journey to the Adriatic Coast.**



Explore Croatia and Montenegro with luxury travel provider Abercrombie & Kent on its Croatia: Jewel of the Coast tour. Uncover the treasures of the Balkans through one-on-one encounters with a local fisherman (along with a chance to sample some oysters), a survivor of the Balkans War and several local craftspeople. This eight-day adventure begins in Croatia's Capital City of Zagreb, followed by a visit to the Plitvice Lakes in Split, hiking the Vidova Gora mountain in Brac, visiting the beaches and mountains of Montenegro and culture and sightseeing in Dubrovnik. September 6, 2013 departure from \$3,860 per person plus airfare.



Clockwise from top: Perast Bay in Kotor, Montenegro; a sidewalk cafe in Dubrovnik, Croatia; the ruins of Roman Emperor Diocletian's palace in Split, Croatia; yachts on the Bay of Kotor; vegetable stall in Dubrovnik's Old Town market; a detail of the fountain outside the Church of Saint Blaise in Dubrovnik; the doorway of a Medieval castle in Budva, Montenegro; Trakošćan castle in Zagreb, Croatia.

