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The town and port of Omiš, located where the Cetina River meets Adriatic Sea in southern Croatia, is dwarfed by breathtakingly rugged cliffs. — PHOTOS: FRANK THOMAE

# Finding beauty and bliss in Central Dalmatia

From historic cities to stunning beaches and rugged trails, this is Croatia at its spectacular best



The harbour and seafront promenade in Bol, the main town on the Croatian island of Brac.

#### FRANK THOMAE

While Dubrovnik has long the Adriatic," Croatia's most spectacular region is Central Dalmatia. It has it all.

Those looking for history have Split and Trogir, two UNESCO cities packed with relics from Roman and Venetian times.

There are islands and beaches, including party-island Hvar, relaxing Vis, and Brac, where you'll find Croatia's most famous beach. Central Dalmatia also boasts Croatia's most stunning coastline, featuring great hiking and dramatic viewpoints (including a drive up the country's highest road).

### SPLIT

The unofficial capital of been touted as the "Pearl of Central Dalmatia, Split is Croatia's second largest city. A pretty city ringed by mountains and sea, it is famous for Diocletian's Palace. Built by Roman Emperor Diocletian in the fourth century AD, the palace is a walled city accessed through four huge gates. Within the walls you'll find churches, palaces and squares including the Peristyle; the main square which features an arcaded courtyard and looks out over St. Domnius Cathedral and its magnificent bell tower (which you can climb).

Split also has the Riva, the promenade along the harbour,

and Marjan Hill, a large park with great views over the city.

The city has many bays and beaches, the most famous being Bacvice. But the best and most family-friendly beach is Bene at the tip of Marjan Park.

For those wanting to hike, Mosor Mountain has many trails, the most challenging being to the peaks of Veli Kabal and Vickov Stup. Kozjak Mountain is less challenging and easier to access with the same incredible views over Split.

Split makes for the best base if you're looking to explore Central Dalmatia. It is centrally located in the region and has ferry connections to all the islands.

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■ Where to Stay: Heritage Hotel Antique Split is a luxury option, well situated in the old town. Hostel Flamingo is recommended for those on a budget. But the best option for those looking to spend more than a few days in Split is Airbnb — there are many apartment options. Expect to pay in the \$40/night range off season and about \$120/night June to August.

■ Restaurants: Bokeria Kitchen & Wine Bar for a fine dining experience. Villa Spiza has high value cuisine.

## **TROGIR**

A UNESCO town 45 minutes up the coast from Split, Trogir was first settled by the Greeks, then conquered by the Romans. Most of its highlights today date from Venetian rule (13th to 15th centuries). It is a small town with a huge concentration of attractions. See the St. Lawrence Cathedral and climb the bell

Trogir can be seen as a day trip from Split but it's worth more than that. Stay a night and walk down the small alleys in the evening — more than any other place in Croatia you'll feel like you've stepped back to Venetian

times. ■ Where to Stay: The Bifora Heritage Hotel is in a convenient location across from the old town and close to beaches.

## OMIŠ

tower.

The town of Omiš is unknown to most visitors. Thirty minutes down the coast from Split it is a small town situated at the meeting point of the Cetina River and the sea. Omiš is dwarfed by huge cliffs and a canyon leading upriver to the mountains of the interior.

The town is known as the "adventure capital of Croatia." You can do ziplining (you'll find Croatia's longest ziplines in Omiš), canyoning, climbing, white-water rafting and hiking. Right above town, looking

straight down is the Starigrad Fortress. It's a 45-minute hike and is worth it for the incredible views. A second fortress, the Mirabella Fortress, is in town and is also worth exploring. Omiš has a pretty main square, some Roman ruins and one of the nicest beaches in Croatia. If you have a car, drive up

the canyon to the Mila Gojsalic statue. It's a 10-minute drive from Omiš. It will give you a taste of the dramatic interior that lies behind the coastal mountain range.



Omiš, a town 30 minutes down the Adriatic coast from Split, is known as the "adventure capital of Croatia." — PHOTOS: FRANK THOMAE

■ Where to Stay: Hotel Plaza is next to the beach and steps from the main square.

## MAKARSKA

Makarska has the most spectacular coastal geography in Croatia. It is a small town known mostly for its beaches and for its location at the foot of Mount Biokovo, Croatia's second-highest mountain. Makarska is all about nature: lying on the beach, enjoying the scenery and hiking and biking along the trails around town. Drive up Biokovo — it's a Nature Park with a 23-km road that takes you past incredible viewpoints, educational trails and historical attractions. The road ends at Sv. Jure peak. At 1,792 metres, it is the third-highest peak in Croatia (and the highest accessible by road). ■ Where to Stay: Hotel Park

Makarska. A Large modern hotel by the beach with excellent facilities.

A view of Hvar Town on the island of Hvar, a place known throughout Europe as Croatia's "party town."