

ISSUE ONE, 2019

# TimeOut

ISTRIA

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# Taste the region



# Istria

# Holiday

with a view



## *Istria: Life as it should be*

Here in Istria, more so than almost any destination you could visit in the region, we live in harmony with nature. This ethos helps to showcase our region as a year-round destination.

'Life as it should be' is our motto. And whichever time of year you visit our beautiful peninsula, you will be able to take part in a traditional, healthy and sustainable way of life, one governed by seasons which provide a bounty of globally-recognised produce.

Our crystal-clear Adriatic offers up the most exquisite, fresh seafood, providing much of the Mediterranean-style diet we consume. From our continental side, the spectacular hilltop towns of Istria and the terraces of vineyards and olive groves give us award-winning wines and olive oils. Famous too are our rich black and white truffles and fine cheeses, both of which stem from the same beloved terrain and terroir as our wines and olives.

Beat the crowds by visiting in springtime, walking down romantic, cobbled streets unfettered by fellow tourists, or arrive in the summertime so the family can take advantage of our beautiful beaches, clean sea and dependable sunshine. Autumn shows Istria at its best; the weather is good and the sea is still warm enough to swim in, it coincides with harvest time, the arrival of the year's new truffles and the start of the hunting season. Each season Istria has its own cultural calendar, from famous film and music festivals to time-honoured food celebrations.

Our major international airport in Pula adds new routes year upon year. Over 70 European destinations including London, Paris and Frankfurt are connected by direct flights to Pula, positioning Istria as an attractive and easy getaway for visitors from all over the world.

It's never been easier to visit Istria. At whatever time you arrive, you won't fail to fall in love with 'Life as it should be'.

Denis Ivošević,  
Director of Istria Tourism Board



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↑  
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**HILLTOP TOWNS**



Outlook festival, p26



Korado Korlević, p22

↑  
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**“We are living in something called the dream society”**

— Korado Korlević

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**Hello, Istria**

Justin McDonnell Editor-in-chief  
@justinmcdonnell



## Welcome to Istria, now get out!

**IT'S HARD TO OVERSTATE** the magic of Istria. Sandwiched between Croatia, Slovenia and Italy, legions of artists and writers have drawn inspiration from this beautiful peninsula, defined by its mist-shrouded hilltops and rugged beaches (P24). A mash-up of Balkan and Italian influences, you'll see it everywhere from the buildings you visit (P18) to the food on your plate (P34). Istria always looks outwards – whether it's stargazing (P22) or hosting world-famous music festivals (P26), this is the Croatian coast at its most bohemian. So, now you're here – get out! And discover everything Istria has to offer.

## THE VIEW FROM YOU

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Welcome

**Time Out**

**ISTRIA**

Published by ORSO PLAN d.o.o.,  
Heizelova 62A, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia,  
on behalf of Time For Croatia Ltd.,  
64 North Row, 4th Floor,  
London, W1K 7DA, UK

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Annual magazine  
Total run: 21,000  
Hard print (3,500), digital print (17,500)

**Photo Credits**

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# A crash course guide to Istria



## CHRISTENED 'TERRA MAGICA'

by the Romans, this compact triangular peninsula has its own, celebrated gastronomy, wines and olive oils. Nothing is ever too far away, and inland is every bit as beautiful as the coast. You can spend the day at the coastal resorts of Rovinj, Poreč or Novigrad then dine luxuriously in the main town of Pula. North-east, towards the Slovenian border, is a small hub of quality Istrian restaurants and spa retreats. Inland is dotted with timeless hilltop villages like Grožnjan, Motovun or Hum, and cuisine that Italians cross the border to savour. On the wilder, less developed east coast, Rabac has seen a number of recent family-friendly or boutique hotel openings. Oddities such as Tito's island menagerie of Brijuni make a longer stay in Istria a varied and attractive proposition.

An easy drive from Zagreb, connected to Venice by a regular

fast-boat service and within easy reach of Rijeka with its ferries that ply the Croatian coast, Istria is reasonably well connected with the outside world. Four major UK airlines, including British Airways, have services to Pula airport while just over the border in Italy, Trieste

is often used as a gateway.

To cross the hilly, verdant interior, you'll need a car, rely on buses or, harking back to Istria's Habsburg past, there's the Parenzana. A narrow-gauge rail that ran from Trieste, through the Istrian interior to terminate halfway down the

coast at Poreč, the line was built in 1902, when Vienna was consolidating its empire.

After World War I, the Parenzana was neglected under lax Italian control before being abandoned completely in 1935.

It has recently been revamped for cyclists and hikers to follow renovated sections of the track around Motovun, Buje and Grožnjan.

Revered, revived and picturesque, the Parenzana is a handy metaphor for Istria itself, its Italianate past, its maritime heritage and its entrepreneurial upswing following Croatian independence.

High-end dining, wine trails, olive oil routes, rustic accommodation with pools, swish boutique hotels, aquaparks, arts festivals, film festivals, festivals of light, electronica and one-off sculptures, depopulated villages now repopulated with gallery owners



and creatives, Istria has been transformed since 1991, but at its own pace. Many of these businesses are still in family hands, two or three generations later. The coast is still pristine and development has been kind.

Historic attractions remain sacrosanct – in fact, the most iconic, the Pula Arena, a Roman colosseum with a near intact circle of stadium walls, hosts all kinds of contemporary events, including the Pula Film Festival, the opening night of soundsystem celebration Outlook, and a summer series of high-profile live concerts. With its forum and its triumphal arch, though, Pula always reminds you of its Roman heyday.

Once the Romans left, the Slavs moved in, but after 2,000 years, Istria has not lost its Latin flair for cultivation and cuisine.

Street signs are usually written in two languages, while most locals are adept at speaking three, English included.

While Dalmatia concentrates on making its money in the summer, Istria's tourist industry is year-round, autumn also busy thanks to the lucrative draw of wine and truffles.

Many of the festivals and celebrations surrounding the new vintage or recently dug trove of sought-after fungi take place in villages whose population barely clicks into three figures. Istria remains a community-based society, tied to the land, tied to tradition and tied to a strong identity forged by geographic isolation.



**'Nothing is ever too far away, and inland is every bit as beautiful as the coast.'**

# Istria Today



**WHATEVER HAPPENS** in Croatian tourism probably happened in Istria first. It was here that Adriatic tourism as we know it first took off, and Istria still functions as an incubator of new ideas, ideas that end up being exported to the rest of the Croatian coast. The reasons for Istria's preeminence are partly geographical – the peninsula lies very close to the Central European cities where most Croatia-bound travellers originally came from, so it's hardly surprising that the Istrian hospitality industry has always been a few steps ahead of everyone else.

However Istria also stands out for reasons unique to the peninsula itself. Take for example Croatia's

breakthrough as a gastronomic destination, a phenomenon rooted in the rediscovery of local culinary riches. Istria always had a reputation of neighbourhood inns serving homemade pasta, local game, seasonal goodies such as asparagus and truffles, and menus that ran from farmhouse sausages to the finest Adriatic scallops and mussels. The contemporary emphasis on locally-sourced food and the unselfconscious readiness to mix high- and low-cuisine was not something that Croatia learned by watching TV chefs on cable TV – it already existed in Istria.

The same might be said of boutique wine. It was the Istrian emphasis on small-scale quality, exemplified by local growers such

as Degrassi, Clai and Matošević, that brought domestic varieties like Malvazija and Teran back to Europe's top tables and gave Croatian wine growers further south something to aim for.

The number of celebrations marking seasonal bounty (whether harvesting chestnuts or fishing for squid) has always been an important part of Istrian life, and it's here that the contemporary Croatian gastro-festival has its roots. Even now, there are more food festivals in Istria than in any other part of Croatia, and

new events are being added to the calendar all the time.

Istria's reputation for innovation doesn't just rest on the constant reinvention of its rustic riches. There's also a brash modernist side to the peninsula that sees tourism as a grand project as well as a cottage industry. It was in Istria after all that the nuts and bolts of Adriatic tourism were first put together. The impetus initially came from outside: Austrian and Italian overlords built roads, railways and resorts to cater for the sophisticated lotus-eaters of Vienna and Rome. However, the mass tourism boom of the Sixties was very much a home-grown

affair. Local architects were brought in to design landmark hotels like the Materada in Poreč and the Eden in Rovinj, creating a distinctive Croatian-modernist style that still serves as an inspiration today. A commitment to socially-responsible planning ensured that

hotel developments and historic town centres were kept apart. It was Istria that took the lead – Dalmatia had to wait until the late Sixties before the hotel-building boom took off, for the simple reason that it didn't have good enough roads.

Innovative hotel architecture is still part and parcel of the Istrian cultural package. Completed in 2012, Rovinj's Hotel Lone (designed by Zagreb's 3LHD), was a deliberate attempt to match the achievements of the Sixties generation by creating something uncompromisingly contemporary that could also serve as an object of beauty. Over on the other side of Rovinj's broad bay is the Hotel Amarin (Studio UP; 2016), an agenda-setting family resort comprising alien-spaceship hotel and innovative, colour-coded children's park. With the hanging-garden terraces of the Grand Hotel Park (3LHD again) currently taking shape opposite Rovinj's medieval centre, the town is beginning to look like a premonition of Croatia's future as well as a well-preserved morsel of an illustrious past.

It's by no means just about

hotels: Istria has always been at the forefront of the Croatian camping scene too. It was here that the first mega-camps emerged in the Sixties and Seventies, and here that the first big naturist camps came into being at around the same time. Naturism, it seems, is slowly on the way out, with big let-it-all-hang-out resorts such as Polari near Rovinj and Koversada near Vrsar being redeveloped as family-oriented glamping sites – mostly for the fully clothed, but with secluded plots reserved for the FKK die-hards.

There are plenty of aspects of the Innovative-Istria brand that transcend mere discussion of tourist facilities. Croatia's new-found reputation as a land of film festivals rested initially on two big Istrian events. Pula (established in 1953; Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* was one of the first films to be screened), and Motovun (launched in 1999 and now a major showcase for independents) are still the only Croatian film festivals that regional cineastes absolutely must attend. It is no surprise that Istria is also home to Croatia's two

**'If it's happened in Croatia, it probably happened in Istria first'**



Parenžana race

essential media-industry shindigs: the Communication Days (May) and Weekend Media Festival (September), both in Rovinj, attract the kind of international experts that Zagreb would find it hard to muster.

Istria's reputation as the summertime heartland of European bass culture (thanks to Pula-based festivals like Outlook and Dimensions) owes a great deal to the initial success of Seasplash, the local reggae and dub event established in 2003. The Adriatic festival template was not something developed by outsiders and brought into the country as a fully-formed business idea – the whole thing took off thanks to a bunch of reggae fans in Pula.

The Seasplash Festival is moving from Pula to the Dalmatian town of Šibenik in 2019. It's a significant loss to the Istrian scene, but also demonstrates the point that we made at the beginning: if it's happening in Croatia, it probably happened in Istria first.



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# A Love Letter To Istria

**ACTUALLY**, this is more of a love song to Istria. It's 40 years since I first set foot on the *Terra Magica* that is Istria. I knew then as a callow 19-year-old that this extraordinary place would play an important part in my life. Quite how important, I had no idea at that time, but after the war when I was invited to come and lecture at the George Soros Funded Imaginary Academy in Grožnjan, the shape of things started to appear. Although I was working as an international producer of feature films out of London, it was here that I met my life partner of 20 years, Marijana, acquired a property on one of the most spectacular and discreet belvederes in the peninsula with a rambling garden along with assorted dogs, cats, and beasts of all creeds and colours. To list the things I love about it in detail would take an age and a number of pages rather than the measly 600 words I've been asked to fill. I've decided therefore to do something a little different with the editorial brief.

It's a little-known fact that the von Trapp family have a long and colourful history in this region. Born in Zadar, Georg von Trapp (yes, Christopher Plummer!) grew up partly in Pula and Rijeka where he attended the Maritime Academy before going on to join the Austro-Hungarian Navy, eventually becoming a submarine captain in the first World War returning to Pula to multiply and set up residence in 1912 at the Casa Trapp, which Austrian architect Ferdinand Geyer designed for them in Veruda. So, half of his singing troupe were born in Pula and the other half in Austria later on before the second World War at his grandmother's house in Austria.

It is in homage to the von Trapp's and with massive apologies to composer Richard Rodgers the composer of *The Sound of Music* and even more to lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II that I have decided to share with you my Favourite Istrian Things via a brutal bastardisation of their masterpiece. (And I've always fancied myself as a latter-day Julie Andrews drag artiste.)

## My (Favourite) Istrian Things

*Snowflakes on Ucka'  
And spring in Grimaldi,  
Kamenjak swimming, and Vrh's ravioli,  
Motovun's Mondo with truffles and films -  
These are a few of my Istrian things.*

*Matosevic' Alba,  
And Kozlovic' bunker,  
Octopus roasted at Alla Beccaccia,  
Dances of Death in Beram and its stings,  
These are a few of my Istrian things.*

*James Joyce in Pula  
And Jules Verne in Pazin  
Casanova in Vrsar with Dante in tandem  
Brioni and Tito, Liz Taylor's big rings  
These are a few of my Istrian things.*

*When the Bura blows  
And Tramontana swings  
Down Lim Kana's "Viking"  
I simply remember my Istrian things  
And then I don't feel so bad.*

*Makina's pictures  
And Sumonja's sheep paintings  
Trapan's Guevara and Buric' creations  
Oil of fine olives that's sure fit for kings,  
These are a few of my Istrian things.*

*Groznjan has artists  
And many fine flautists  
Pula has ships and a shit load of tourists  
The Arena's a wonderful sight to be seen  
These are a few of my Istrian things.*

*Sailing round Cres  
On the Kvarner  
Sea starts looking mad,  
I simply remember my Istrian things  
And then I don't feeeeeeeeeeel..... so baeaaad!*

I could go on, but there's enough here for a good week's worth of exploration. Istria is full of amazing things to do – and the development of the interior of the peninsula alongside coastal tourism has been the goal of successive local governments. It's a great place to visit and is a place of paradoxes and chance encounters. A few weeks ago, I went to the Arena in Pula, probably the best preserved and most complete Roman Arena of its kind. As I do, I was following around an American family of five – three young boys who barely looked at the place, kids not listening to their (probably teachers) parents and constantly squabbling among themselves. The squabbles turning into an argument – a nasty one. The last thing I heard as I went down the steps to leave, beating a hasty retreat before it got ugly – Dad: *'I cant believe you kids. We come halfway round the world to see this Colosseum and all you do is fight. This is not the place for fighting!'* And so it goes....



Mike Downey is a film producer who has worked on over 80 features with the likes of Peter Greenaway, Pawel Pawlikowski, Gunter Grass, Thomas Kenneally and James Ellroy. He is deputy chairman of the European Film Academy and President and co-founder of the Motovun Film festival as well as Artistic Advisor of The Zagreb Film Festival.

# TO DO

The best events in Istria this season

## APRIL

### South on Two Wheels

A series of six recreational cycle rides in southern Istria, spread throughout spring and autumn. Each route is suitable for recreational cyclists of all ages, and is designed to take you through the best of the region's scenery. There's always a relaxed post-race party at the end of the course. This year's dates are Fažana (27 April), Vodnjan (18 May) Šišanj to Ližnjan (15 June), Divšići (14 Sept), Pula (27 Sept) and Medulin (5 Oct).  
→ Various venues, Istria ([istria-pula.com](http://istria-pula.com)). From April.

### The Festival of Wild, Edible and Medicinal Plants

Tenth anniversary of this event offering tips in the cultivation, extraction and the medicinal use of plants and herbs. There are lots of different natural products to try and take home, bought straight from the hands of those who make them.  
→ Kršan. April.

### 100 miles of Istria

A major international event for long-distance trail runners, nowadays attracting over 2000 competitors. There are four different courses, ranging from the 41km-long, "beginners" yellow trail to the superhuman, Istria-spanning, 168km red trail – a

two-day course with an overnight kip in the middle. The yellow race begins and ends in Motovun and can be quite a spectacle; the red trail ends up in Umag.  
→ Labin-Umag ([istria100.com](http://istria100.com)). April 12-14.

### Šparogada

Annual celebration of the asparagus with a great cultural and sports programme attached, including activities for all ages and usually some great traditional music and recognised Croatian acts. For fans of the flavour-filled green fingers, you can sample plenty of asparagus-based dishes made by local caterers.  
→ Various venues, Kaštel ([facebook.com/events/1142884872545908](https://facebook.com/events/1142884872545908)). April 26-28.



100 miles of Istria

### Labyrinth Istria

This new Istrian installment of the longstanding Belgian techno festival promises 36 hours of non-stop music. It begins on Friday night at club Byblos with an extended session featuring headliners Pan-Pot and Marcel Fengler. The party moves to the beach for the daylight hours of Saturday, before heading back indoors at club Zodiak for Saturday night and Sunday morning. Also appearing on the bill are lots of homegrown DJ talent including Mozer, Bronski and Andrea Ljekaj.  
→ Various Venues, Poreč ([facebook.com/labyrinthopen](https://facebook.com/labyrinthopen)). April 26-28.

### Primavera Craft Beer & Gin Festival

This weekend festival shines its attentions equally on Croatia's craft beer revolution and a resurgence in popularity of drinking gin. One of Pula's very best bars for quality drinks, cocktails and music events plays the perfect host, so expect ingenious gin cocktails and a variety of entertainments on their large terrace with its wonderful views. Musical headliners for the weekend are Croatia's leading electronic pop dance duo, the enigmatic Nipplepeople.  
→ Caffè bar Circolo 17, Pula ([facebook.com/Circolo17caffè](https://facebook.com/Circolo17caffè)). April 26-27.

### Prvi Maj Geri

Anticipating the May Day holiday is this open-air festival headlined by Belgrade alt-rock power trio Repetitor, Bjelovar prog-noise rockers Them Moose Rush and Split rapper Vojko Vručina.  
→ Kaštel, Pula ([entrio.hr](http://entrio.hr)). April 27.



Days of Antiquity - Pula Superiorvm

## MAY

### Love Sensual

Latino-African dance festival (with styles like Dominican bachata and Angolan kizomba predominating), featuring demonstrations by top dancers and workshops led by international dance instructors. There's a gala performance on the main square on 4 May.  
→ Hotel Valamar, Poreč ([love-sensual.hr](http://love-sensual.hr)). May 3-5.

### Rovinj Photodays

A major international photography event with exhibitions in outdoor locations and indoor venues throughout the town. There's an accompanying programme of talks and concerts, and prizes are given in different categories.  
→ Various venues, Rovinj ([photodays-rovinj.com](http://photodays-rovinj.com)). May 3-5.

### Vinistra Wine Festival

Far more than just a trade fair, this annual get-together for Istrian wine-makers presents a cracking opportunity to taste your way through all the local varieties, and munch a handsome selection of local deli products into the bargain.  
→ Žatika sports hall, Poreč ([vinistra.com](http://vinistra.com)). May 12.

### Days of Antiquity – Pula Superiorvm

Swords and sandals take over the centre of Pula with parades of Roman legionaries, gladiator training exercises, music and dancing, and kids' workshops. Most events take place in front of the Temple of Jupiter on the main square. On Fridays 5-9pm, on

Saturdays 10am-1pm.

→ Pula city centre ([pulainfo.hr](http://pulainfo.hr)). May 24-25. May 31-June 1. June 7-8. June 14-15.

### Gallery rally

Now in its sixth year, Gallery Rally creates an urban map of venues to visit which aims to put local artists and exhibition spaces in the spotlight. Born in Zagreb, but now in its second year in Pula too, visitors have a five-hour period to visit as many participating galleries as they can. Collect a special event map from HUIU at Zagrebačka 27 and then collect stickers from each of the around 15 galleries as you knock them off your list. Visitors who complete the sticker quota on the map will receive a memento at the finish line.  
→ Various venues, Pula ([facebook.com/reliopogalerijama](https://facebook.com/reliopogalerijama)). May 24

### Sea Star Festival

A relatively recent offshoot of the Exit Festival in Novi Sad, the DJ-oriented Sea Star pulled in 80,000 fans in 2018 and looks set to repeat its success in 2019. This year's roster of knob-twiddlers includes German trance-techno legend Sven Väth and Nina Kraviz.  
→ Stella Maris Resort, Umag ([seastarfestival.com](http://seastarfestival.com)). May 24-25.

### Adris RC44 Race Cup

The Rovinj leg of the international RC44 yachting grand prix brings the world sailing elite to the Istrian coast.  
→ Rovinj. May 29-June 2.

### Lighthouse Festival

Held at the tip of a relatively wild and untouched peninsula between

Novigrad and Poreč, Lighthouse Festival is a well organised underground electronic music festival which also holds an edition in Cape Town, South Africa. This year's headliners, who will be playing techno and house music, are yet to be revealed.

→ Poreč ([lighthousefestival.tv](http://lighthousefestival.tv)). May 29-June 2.

## JUNE

### Poreč Open-Air Festival

A summer-long programme of events encompassing street entertainers, outdoor film screenings and live music on open-air stages occurring throughout the town.  
→ Various venues, Poreč ([porecopenair.com](http://porecopenair.com)). June-Sept.

### Indirekt

Boutique festival dedicated to alternative music, art and literature, with on-site camping and an intimate friendly vibe.  
→ Umag ([indirekt.eu](http://indirekt.eu)). June.

### Festival of Istrian Maneštra

All day festival which is both a celebration of Istrian Maneštra and a fiercely fought competition for whose is the best. Teams cook this thick soup/stew of pulses, vegetables, meats and herbs on the streets all day and you'll be able to sample their efforts come dinner time.  
→ Gračišće. June.

### Spectacvla antiqva

This extravaganza which celebrates ancient Rome takes

over the Pula Arena once a week (usually Saturday evening if other events allow), except during the Pula Film Festival when it takes a mid-season break. There is a parade of Roman fashions and hairstyles with explanatory narration, and gladiator fights featuring "real weapons" and lots of theatrical gore.

→ Arena, Pula ([spectaculaantiqua.com](https://spectaculaantiqua.com)). Mid June-early Sept.

### Foo Fighters

Such is the public affection for David Grohl and his rowdy rock juggernaut that these dates sold out within minutes of their announcement. If you didn't have the foresight to book, you can at least stand outside the Arena and crane an ear.

→ Arena, Pula. June 18+19.

### Croatian Summer Salsa Festival

A week of sashaying and shimmying with demonstrations by top international performers and workshops for those with all levels of ability. Mostly Salsa, but a lot more Latin dance styles besides.  
→ Rovinj ([crosalsafestival.com](http://crosalsafestival.com)). June 24-July 1.

## JULY

### PUF International Alternative Theatre Festival

Non-mainstream performing arts in all kinds of challenging permutations, with events held at the Rojc cultural centre and elsewhere around the city.  
→ Pula ([pulainfo.hr](http://pulainfo.hr)). July 1-5.



Sea Star Festival

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## Things to Do



### The Festival of Istrian Pasta

A celebration of pasta which places the food in the heart of Istrian cuisine. Local cheeses, vegetables, seafood, meats and herbs are used to concoct dishes you can try, paired with Istrian wine. You can learn how to make traditional pasta shapes of the region and chill out around dusk, when the event becomes lit with lamps and candles.

→ Zminj, July.

### Labin Art Republic

Summer-long arts festival with local painters throwing open their atelier doors, and a feast of theatre and music in a variety of outdoor spaces.

→ Old Town, Labin (labin-art-republika.com). July-August

### Goat Hell

Destruction, Pestilence, Evil Blood and other acts your grandparents wouldn't understand headline this dark and old school heavy metal fest at Vallelunga, on the north side of Pula's harbour.

→ Vallelunga, Pula (goathell.eu). July 4-7.

### Plava Laguna Croatian Open

Croatia's leading tennis event,

played on clay; it's part of the ATP tour which ensures a fair sprinkling of international aces alongside homegrown stars.

→ Umag (croatiaopen.hr). July 12-July 21.

### Pula Film Festival

Running since 1953 even before



Cannes, the Pula Film Festival is partly held in the city's historic Roman amphitheatre, which transforms into an open-air cinema and venue for opening night and the award ceremonies. The agenda includes Croatian and international films as well as a student programme, evening concerts and audience interaction with well known personalities from the world of film.

→ Pula Arena, Kino Valli and various other venues, Pula (pulafilmfestival.hr). July 13-21.

### Traditional Evenings on the Fažana Waterfront (Tradicijske večeri na fažanskoj rivi)

A fair promoting local drink, handicrafts and food, with the famous Fažana pilchard playing a starring role.

→ Fažana (infofazana.hr). July 17.

### Aida

A spectacular opera in a spectacular setting, Verdi's Egypt-based warble fest takes over Pula Arena for what looks like being an unforgettable night.

→ Arena, Pula (eventim.hr). July 25.

### Legendfest

Istria is a treasure trove of traditional folk tales and occult lore, a heritage celebrated by this two-day festival of readings, exhibitions and children's entertainment.

→ Pićani (legendfest.hr). July 26-27.

### Ode to Joy

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony gets a run-out in the suitably magnificent surroundings of Pula's amphitheatre, performed by the orchestra and choir of the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka.

→ Arena, Pula (eventim.hr). July 27.

### Tomato Days

Gallons of salsa (and for once we are talking about the sauce, not the dance) are consumed in this street festival commemorating the tomato harvest, with an accompanying programme of outdoor entertainment and live music.

→ Various venues, Umag (colourofistria.com). July 25.

## AUGUST

### Carmen

The stars of Rijeka opera perform Bizet's classic in Pula's Roman amphitheatre, with mezzosoprano Ivana Sribljan in the title role.

→ Arena, Pula (eventim.hr). August 1.

### Monte Paradiso Punk Festival

One of Croatia's longest-running music festivals, this is pretty much what it says on the label, with an international selection of hard-riffing anarcho-rockers performing in the courtyard of the Rojc cultural centre.

→ DC Rojc, Pula (monteparadiso.info). August 2-4.

### Dubioza Kolektiv

Formed in 2003 and hailing from Bosnia, Dubioza Kolektiv combine hip hop, dub, ska, reggae, rock, punk and electronic music influences which really come to life in the live arena. Singing in multiple tongues, the band have toured in many different countries where their explosive live show and warm interaction with audiences has broken through anything as trivial as language barriers. This date promises to be one of the year's highlights for domestic audiences, but we recommend that visitors also not miss this treat. The combination of atmosphere, music and the incredible setting will be something you won't easily forget.

→ Arena, Pula (eventim.hr). August 10.

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**Grisia**

Fantastic open-to-all art exhibition with hundreds of paintings displayed along the length of Grisia, medieval Rovinj's main street.  
→ Rovinj (rovinj-tourism.com). August 11.

**Mussels Festival**

Vabriga near Poreč is the venue for this annual knees-up celebrating the local crop of mussels (pedoči). The delicacy is served in several various recipes and alongside all manner of other seafood, and the wine will be flowing freely.  
→ Vabriga (tar-vabriga.com). August.

**International Pula Jazz Festival**

Top-quality horn-doodling in the evocative surrounds of a Habsburg-era officers' club and its ornate garden.  
→ Dom Hrvatskih branitelja / House of Croatian Defenders, Pula (eventim.hr). August 13-15.

**Trka na prstenac (Tilting at the Ring)**

Centuries-old knightly tournament in the village of Barban, in which locals on horseback try to spear a dangling ring. The main race is on the final Sunday, but there are three days of festivities with folklore, DJs and live bands.  
→ Barban (trkanaprstenac.hr). August 16-18.

**Leron Folk Festival**

Popular international folk festival with a procession on Friday evening followed by concerts on the main-square stage.  
→ Vodnjan (vodnjandignano.com). August 23-24.

**Motovun Film Festival**

An international film festival and five-day party all in one, Motovun Film Festival is held in the beautiful Venetian town of Motovun, 270m above sea level. International and ex-Yu films are screened at a number of pop-up cinemas both indoors and out; screenings take place from early morning until around 2am. Directors from around the world compete for the prestigious Propeler Award, and interactive events involving film experts and staff take place around Motovun for those wishing for a little in-depth insight.  
→ Various venues, Motovun (motovunfilmfestival.com). August 23-27.

**Festival of St Pelagius**

St Pelagius's Day (August 28) is stretched into a long weekend of events in Novigrad, with seafood stalls, outdoor concerts and fireworks adding up to a grand fiesta.  
→ Novigrad (coloursofistria.com). August 23-28.

**Dimensions Festival**

A major player in the international underground dance music scene, the well curated Dimensions boasts a line-up of the biggest DJs and live dance acts on the planet. Omar-S, Peggy Gou, Nina Kraviz, Joy Orbison, Helena Hauff, dBridge, Hessele Audio, Gilles Peterson, Call Super, Mr Scruff, Blawan, Andrew Weatherall, Craig Richards, Shanti Celeste, DVSI, DJ Stingray and DJ Bone provide DJ sets over this year's four days, with DMX Krew, Radioactive Man, Larry Heard aka Mr. Fingers, Octave One and Dam-Funk performing live. Wednesday night's opening show at Pula Arena features Detroit's Jeff Mills in a performance that will also feature Afrobeat rhythm pioneer Tony Allen, with Objekt performing an opening slot and Hunee DJing to round off the party. Main site stages feature top rate production facets and are hidden among the ancient ruins of Pula, on various boats and swathes of the beach. Accommodation options include on-site camping, private rented apartments or nearby hotels.  
→ Fort Punta Christo, Štinjan, near Pula (dimensionsfestival.com). Aug 28-Sept 2.

**SEPTEMBER**

**Outlook Festival**

The premier annual event of the bass music scene, Outlook offers a party-minded soundtrack of garage, dubstep, hip hop, dub, drum n' bass and reggae for a young and carefree international audience. Chase & Status, Bugzy Malone, Goldie (live), dBridge, Grooverider, LTJ Bukem, Calibre, Randall, Kabaka Pyramid, Flava D, DJ Zinc, My Nu Leng & Dread MC, Ghetts, D Double E, Aitch, Unknown T, Channel One Soundsystem, Iration Steppas and Sister Nancy & Legal Shot

**SEPTEMBER**



**Visualia**

Established as Croatia's first festival of light, Visualia presents the magic and beauty of new technologies and audiovisual art, as well as branding Pula as a pioneer in this field. For this seventh annual edition in September 2019, the novelty is that Visualia will be partnered with the International Light Association, which brings together global professionals with a common desire to share knowledge, skills and passion. Their mission is also to share and disseminate information and promote research in the field of light. The ILA consists of many audiovisual artists, many of whom will exhibit their works as part of Visualia 2019. Some 300 ILA members will also be holding their next conference in Pula during this event.

Visualia was first held in 2013, with 3D Mapping, and its agenda has been increasing every year. First followed the Lighting Giants illuminated cranes of Uljanik Shipyard, which have since become a new city attraction. In 2015, a Guinness World Record was broken in the Pula Arena for the largest photograph of people forming a light sign, known as the Light Postcard. This year's event, held between September 19 and 21 is expected to attract some 15,000 visitors. Its visual identity has been created by Jean Sambolec, 3D artist with long experience in 3D visualisation, design and animation. On the last night, the Pula X Race will be held through the city bathed in light.  
→ Various locations in Pula, Sept 19 (facebook.com/VisualiaFestival)

Sound, Joker, Matt Jam Lamont, DJ Rap and Holy Goof provide the sounds at the main site alongside Manchester's finest Chimp, MC Fox, Chunky and MC DRS. Wednesday night's opening show at Pula Arena features Andy C, Mala & The Outlook Orchestra, Loyle Carner, Shy FX (live), Gentlemans Dub Club and Flohio. The festival uses exactly the same infrastructure as Dimensions and again, accommodation

options include on-site camping, private rented apartments or nearby hotels.  
→ Fort Punta Christo, Štinjan near Pula (outlookfestival.com). Sept 4-9.

**Buzetska Subotina (Buzet Saturday)**

One of inland Istria's biggest street parties, culminating in the frying of a massive truffle omelette (made with the symbolic number of 2019 eggs). There are plenty of stalls

selling food, drink and crafts, and an outdoor concert stage with great traditional music and dancing.  
→ Buzet (tz-buzet.hr). Sept 7.

**Pulska Xica**

A highly enjoyable fun run that takes place at night, with a circuit that starts at the Arena, runs past the lighting giants, and through the Zerostrasse tunnels.  
→ Pula (pulainfo.hr). Sept 21.

**Visualia Festival of Light**

Light installations, art works and illuminated performance art throughout the city, with both the Roman Arena and the shipyard Lighting Giants playing spectacular roles.  
→ Pula (facebook.com/VisualiaFestival). Sept 19-21.

**Weekend Media Festival**

The great and the good of Croatia's media industries assemble for a week-long overdose of talks, exhibitions, discussions and seminars.  
→ Rovinj (weekendmediafestival.com). Sept.

**MTB Parenzana**

Recreational cycling marathon featuring a 43km section of the Parenzana, the former narrow-gauge railway that is now a long-distance cycling route. Heading from Vižinada past Motovun to Livade and back, it's a great way to experience rural Istria.  
→ Vižinada. September 29.

**Truffle Days**

The autumn truffle harvest is marked by numerous events in northeastern Istria, with village fairs and gastro-mini festivals taking up the weekends between mid September and early November.  
→ Buzet (tz-buzet.hr) Motovun (tz-motovun.hr) Livade (oprtalj.hr). Sept-Nov.

**OCTOBER**

**Bela Nedelja (White Sunday)**

A traditional folk festival that used to be a major annual fair drawing in merchants from the entire region. Nowadays it's a folksy knees-up with morning mass followed by music dancing and workshops for kids.  
→ Plomin (istra-kršan.com). October 6.

**Istrian Grappa Fair**

19th annual edition of this home-made alcohol festival at which you can try grappa (also known as rakija or brandy) made from things like cherry, quince, plum, grape, honey and walnut. One of the most famous local versions is a reputedly medicinal variety made from mistletoe and herbs.  
→ Hum. October.

**Chestnut Fair**

Eleventh annual edition celebrating this locally-abundant crop. Chestnut based cakes, other desserts and a range of products derived from the nut are all available to try and take home.  
→ Oprtalj. October.

**International Pršut Festival**

Traditional gastro event celebrating the home-cured ham for which the region is famous. It's very much an international event, offering the chance to taste delicacies from northern Italy and Spain as well as the succulent porky pride of Istria.  
→ Tinjan (isap.hr). Mid Oct.

**NOVEMBER**

**Days of Young Olive Oil**

Standing at the centre of a prolific olive-growing area, the town of Vodnjan celebrates the harvesting and pressing season with this two-day celebration of the local elixir. Local producers display their wares in a big marquee, and there's plenty of food, drink and music to keep the party swinging. All in all it's a fabulous opportunity to learn about, taste and buy oil, in an area that's famous for its high-quality production.  
→ Vodnjan (dmnu.info). November.

**DECEMBER**

**Days of Adriatic Squid**


Winter is the season for squid-fishing, hence this celebration of its culinary grandeur in the towns of Umag, Novigrad, Brtonigla and Buje. Restaurants throughout the region prepare special squid menus, providing some idea of just how versatile this squelchy little creature can be.  
→ Various venues throughout northwest Istria (coloursofistria.com). December.

**Sa(n)jam Knjige/Book Fair(y)**

Istria's premier literary event, and arguably the best book festival in Croatia as a whole, this ten-day affair offers readings, talks, and lots of stalls selling books. There's

always a strong international element (chief guest in 2018 was Nigerian Nobel-winner Wole Soyinka), and events are often conducted in English.  
→ Dom hrvatskih branitelja / House of Croatian Defenders, Pula (sanjamknjige.hr). Dec 5-15

**FEBRUARY 2020**



**Pula Carnival**

The fifth annual traditional Pula Carnival will be held on Saturday, February 23 – though the whole event will be starting much earlier, on January 17, with the Handover of the City Key to the Master of the Carnival at the City Hall. On March 5, the burning of the bogeyman Pust takes place near the traffic lights at Veli Vrh. For the main parade, masked visitors gather, along with some 20 carnival groups from Istria, Kvarner and Slovenia, over 700 participants in all, led by the Pula Wind Orchestra and majorettes. Groups will be setting up at noon at a large marquee set up at the Karolina car park, where lunch and communal celebrations take place. The procession will be calling at the Arena, Trig Portarata, Sergijevaca, the Forum and Kandlerova, with themed floats gliding along Laginjina and the Riva waterfront. Back at the marquee, the Big Carnival Party starts at 3pm with DJ Teddy Lee and live acts Mauro Staraj & La Banda. Registration forms are available from the Pula Tourist Office.  
→ Various locations in Pula, Feb 2020.

# Art & Culture

Edited by Justin McDonnell  
timeout.com/croatia/art-culture

## A history of Istria in ten buildings

Jonathan Bousfield explores the history of Istria in ten brilliant buildings.

**THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY** fine buildings in Istria for a list of ten to do the region justice. Indeed, many of the peninsula's must-visit sights are historic hill-towns; urban ensembles rather than individual buildings, they really require a separate top-ten of their own. The list below will provide ten small insights into Istria's rich and complex heritage.



### Poreč Basilica

With the fragmentation of the Roman Empire Istria ended up under Byzantine rule, opening up the peninsula to the architecture and culture of the Christian East. Poreč Basilica is the best example of what the Byzantines left behind, a largely sixth-century complex with a colonnaded three-aisled interior and an octagonal baptistery on the opposite side of the courtyard. Most famous feature is the dazzling mosaic-covered apse, with portraits of the Virgin and Child standing together with a row of saints and holy men. Golden mosaic tiles are placed at angles to catch sunlight at different times of day, bathing the aisle in heavenly light.



### Kažun

Not so much a single building as an Istrian trademark, examples of the *kažun* can be found in fields all over Southwestern Istria. A small cylindrical structure with a conical roof, the *kažun* was built out of dry stone to serve as shelter for farmers and shepherds. Dating from prehistoric times, it was a form of construction that survived well into the modern era, and is now an enduring symbol of local heritage.

### Our Lady of the Rocks, Beram

The gothic graveyard chapel on the edge of Beram is pretty plain on the outside; the real surprise is what lies within. Walls and ceilings are covered in incandescent fifteenth-century frescoes, arranged in narrative panels rather like a racy comic strip. Most famous scene is the Dance of Death, in which sinners both rich and poor are invited to hit the floor by a happy band of trumpet-tootling skeletons. The scenes were painted by a team of artists led by a certain Vincent of Kastav, who signed his name above a side door of the chapel.



### Pula Arena

The Romans had a huge impact on Istria and it's in Pula that their greatest heirloom is to be found. Dominating the city from its perch just above the seafront, the first-century Arena is as mesmerizing a relic as they come, its sensuous curves and arches set neatly into sloping ground. It was initially designed to hold 22,000 spectators, which gives you some idea of Roman Pula's size and importance. Nowadays seating 7000, it still serves as the stirring venue for pop-rock concerts, opera, and the annual film festival.



### Veliki Trg (“Grand Square”), Svetvinčenat

It might be stretching things a bit to squeeze a whole square into our list, but this is the finest example of Renaissance town planning in the whole of Istria. With the walls of the Morosini-Grimani Palace on one side, a handsome row of town houses on the other, and the trefoil façade of the parish church looking on demurely from the wings, it’s the perfect example of what a town square ought to be. Most of the ensemble is sixteenth-century; the later addition of a loggia and a town well provided the icing on the cake.



### Hotel Lone, Rovinj

Built right next to the Eden by leading Zagreb architects 3LHD in 2012, the Hotel Lone was intended to function as a total work of art, a showcase of local talent from the light fittings right down to the staff uniforms (the latter designed by edgy Zagreb fashion label I-GLE). A dreamily organic structure with lots of smooth curves, it’s certainly the kind of iconic building that dominates its surroundings. The sheer ambition of the Lone project has inspired others in Rovinj (which is fast become a mecca for students of contemporary architecture), with the similarly organic Hotel Amarin (designed by Split-based Studio UP), and 3LHD’s Grand Hotel Park, proving that corporate leisure architecture can be both ground-breaking and beautiful at the same time.



### Hotel Eden, Rovinj

Tourism in Istria dates back at least to the late nineteenth century (and maybe even to Roman times), although it was in the 1960s and 1970s that it became the peninsula’s main industry. Since then it has been the hotel, not the church, the palace or the post office, that has become the dominant architectural statement of the age. Designed by Ivo Bartolić and Miroslav Begović in 1971 this is a perfect example of leisure-driven modernism, its 600 rooms neatly arranged in a series of interlocking concrete planes. Squeezed onto an awkward plot of land, and partly raised on pillars to take account of the sloping ground, it’s a zig-zagging structure with two extended wings, giving it the appearance of a slowly advancing crab. It pretty much sums up everything that Croatian architects wanted to do in the Sixties and Seventies – an identifiably Mediterranean form of modernism that would impress foreign tourists while staying true to local needs.

### Hotel Riviera, Pula

After 1848 Pula became the main military port of the Habsburg Empire, abuzz with the comings and goings of naval officers, shipyard engineers, Austrian civil servants and – increasingly – tourists attracted by the mild climate of the Adriatic coast. Opened in 1909, the Hotel Riviera combined a fashionable mélange of Neo-Baroque, Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Everything styles, a handsome piece of central Vienna trowelled neatly into Istrian soil. Once the haunt of international movie stars attending the Pula Film Festival, it’s currently a rather dowdy and old-fashioned affair – although its redevelopment as a 5-star lap of luxury looks very much on the cards.



### Sveti Petar u Šumi

Definitely worth a stop-off if you are touring inland Istria, the knoll-crowning Pauline abbey of Sveti Petar u Šumi (literally “St Peter-in-the-forest”, the name itself sounds like an invitation to visit) encompasses pretty much everything that’s good about monastic architecture. The main church is Baroque, cluttered with all manner of paintings and altarpieces knocked up by artists who were also members of the order. Outside is a sublime Renaissance cloister, with two tiers of colonnades and a sturdy-looking well marking the centre.



### Pula Post Office

Arguably Istria’s one outstanding example of inter-war modernism, this subtly angular building was designed in 1933 by Angiolo Mazzoni, an architect who specialized in railway stations but was frequently on hand to design other public buildings as well. Mazzoni was careful to produce practical buildings that served their purpose but never left out the odd avant-garde detail: note the swirly spiral staircase that ascends from the building’s entrance lobby.



# Searching for stars

Marc Rowlands meets Croatia's best-known astronomer Korado Korlević and learns that not all is what it seems at the world-famous Višnjan Observatory.

'WE ARE LIVING in something called the dream society,' begins Korado Korlević in rather abstract fashion as we meet for lunch. Standing well over six feet tall, aged 61, it is not merely his imposing physical stature and the wisdom of his years that make you submit to his train of thought and listen intently; his incredible reputation precedes him. Korado Korlević is Croatia's most famous astronomer, the public face of the Višnjan Observatory. A relatively small facility, located in continental, northwest Istria, it no less holds a global significance, thanks largely to Korlević's work. As a result, he is a well-known face in Croatia's media, called on to appear in TV discussion shows, offering informed opinions on science and the future. A kindly, personable soul with tremendous communication skills, he agrees to these requests. But after no short time in his company, it becomes apparent this is not his main motivation. Neither is astronomy, for that matter. Korado Korlević is an educator.

'Society is selling dreams. You can choose if you want to be the buyer or the seller of dreams. We teach that it is better to produce than buy'.

The 'we' Korlević refers to are his fellow teachers in Višnjan. For, although founded as an observatory, the facility has grown to become the Višnjan Science and Education Centre. In classic Istrian fashion, it stands outside of the regular school system and curriculum in Croatia. A privately funded centre of excellence that teaches thousands of students of all abilities between the ages of 11 and 18 from across Croatia, it also welcomes hundreds of youngsters with an aptitude for science, who travel from all over the world to take part in its internationally renowned summer schools. In recent years, over 150 students have visited the camps each summer, travelling to Istria from countries as diverse as France, India, Japan, Canada, USA, Russia, Serbia and Turkey, a much more cosmopolitan cabal even than

you would find on Istrian beaches in the same period. But why Višnjan? Why Istria?

'Only stupid people make an observatory in the north Adriatic,' says Korlević, half laughing, half serious. 'You have clouds, rain and fog. But it is not the place of the observatory which is important. It is a place to which kids can travel. It would be better to make an observatory on one of our most remote islands, or on a mountain in the desert in Namibia. No clouds, no light pollution, no nothing. But it would be useless to do so because nobody could come.'

Although he uses Istria's easy accessibility as an explanation, Korlević does so modestly. For Korado Korlević, like his ancestors before him, has always been in Istria. And it is probably true to say that without his foresight, determination and independent nature of thinking, the observatory or education centre would exist here at all.

'I was living in a place where you can really see the stars,' recalls Korlević of his youth spent in the local vicinity. 'But, it doesn't actually mean

anything if you just go outside and see little dots in the sky without knowing what they are. I really only saw the stars after I started to read about them. After reading, I realised just how immense space is.'

Books about the stars were not the only thing the youthful Korlević read. A gifted student with a curious mind, by the eighth grade he had read all of the books in his school library. But, in a trait he now sees mirrored in his some of his own students from the locale, his ambitions did not match his abilities. He had every intention of becoming a blacksmith or a tractor driver.

'Often, if you ask kids "What would you like to become?", many would say "A receptionist in Poreč", "A waiter", "A cook". But when you are working with these kids you see that you have the potential in your hands of a Nobel Prize winner. Their hopes are so low'

After others had to almost force him to attend a well-regarded school in Pula, where his sponge-like mind could finally get the exercise it

needed, he completed his studies and shrugged off the opportunity of pursuing high academia. Instead, he returned to Višnjan to take up a post as a teacher in an elementary school.

While still a student there, in 1976, he had already co-founded an astronomical society alongside another student and his teacher. After leaving his post at the elementary school, this modest club, through his tireless endeavours, would eventually become the major observatory and educational centre it is today, its facilities bolstered over the years by donations from private supporters and admiring sectors of the international astronomical community. But it was not always an easy ride.

'In Yugoslavia, the only place where you could coat optics was at a military factory in Sarajevo,' remembers Korlević of the times of war in the '90s. His observatory had already suffered a major setback when Yugoslavia disintegrated as all of their contacts for sharing information had previously been in Russia.

'And so the telescope became an optical instrument of the Bosnia army. I received a letter through the Red Cross in '93 from a commander saying "I am wounded. And probably the telescope will be lost. Sorry". So, we started to build a new one from scratch. It cost 75 Deutschmarks, about 35 Euros. But, at the end of the war, the Bosnian commander managed to save the optics and returned them. We no longer use them, it is just at the observatory as part of our history. But it is also a part of the history of Sarajevo.'

After the observatory became fully functional again following the war, Korlević more than made up for lost time. In the period just from 1996 to 2001, he discovered 947 asteroids and participated in the discovery of a further 110, placing him as the 18th most productive tracer for asteroids of all time. Over 1400 asteroids have been discovered in Višnjan, making it the twelfth most productive observatory of all time.

'We are a small observatory, run by teachers and students, yet we are the fourth observatory in the world in terms of support for potentially hazardous objects which might hit the Earth,' says Korlević matter-of-factly. 'We do 38 percent of the work in that field for the world. If you compare us with our peers, the Chinese Academy of Science, with 13 full-time employees, or the European Space Agency...'

As alien-looking within the beautiful natural surroundings of sleepy, continental Istria as the objects far from Earth which it observes, Višnjan observatory, despite its significance and achievements, is viewed by Korlević as somewhat of a ploy in a greater scheme.

'The observatory for us is like the bait for a fisherman,' he says, smiling warmly. 'It is bright, shiny, sparkly, exciting. But really we only use it to attract the little fish. That is astronomy.'

Now somewhat derisive of the science of astronomy, Korlević has helped direct the educational centre into what he regards as more pioneering and prescient areas. The centre now holds a biological laboratory, a geological laboratory, a lab for advanced technologies and robotics, Korlević being of the opinion that the most valuable sciences of the future will be biology, astrobology, artificial intelligence, robotics and genetics.

Despite the gradual shift in focus, the same ethos lies at the heart of Korlević's teaching process. Eschewing the systems of modern education, which many think of as an exercise in learning and repetition in order to pass exams, Korlević's approach is to unlock the potential of the mind and to let it run free, aided by imagination and unafraid to learn by making mistakes.

'One of our key mottos is "Best practices are stupid",' he says. 'Because, if you follow best practices, at best you will always be second. Sometimes this works for us, sometimes it does not. But we always teach our children that they have the capacity to be the first.'

It is a modus operandi that has worked. Despite Višnjan being a quiet, 600 person village, the alumni of Višnjan Science and Education Centre can now be found as leaders in their fields in the world of science and academia. Former students now attend universities like Harvard and Cambridge and graduates include Marija Jurić, a PhD from Princeton, winner of NASA's Astronomy and Astrophysics Research Fellowship and a professor at the University of Washington. Also, Silvia Gradečak, a lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Marina Rejkuba, an astronomer at the European Southern Observatory and Marina Brozović, who works detecting dangerous asteroids in the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.

Despite the far-flung diaspora of former students, their teacher remains at home in the peaceful village of Višnjan, teaching by day, watching the skies by night and venturing home for only a few hours daily to enjoy the company of his wife and the menagerie of rescued animals they keep at their home. But, having earned such a name for himself on the global stage of astronomy, had Korlević ever considered travelling away from the gently rolling slopes of vineyards and olive groves that surround Višnjan, in pursuit of this science?

'If you are alone, it is simple to travel. If you have a family, it is difficult. If you have

students, it is impossible,' says Korado Korlević, as a man adamant his calling was greater than the pursuit of career. 'In the '90s I had an offer to move to Arizona to take a position there, but then one of the kids asked me 'Professor, what will happen with us when you go away?' I understood then that I had no right to go. I felt like the path of learning they were on was something I had promised them that we would do together. And so that is what I did.' Marc Rowlands.

**'In classic Istrian fashion, the Višnjan Science and Education Centre stands outside of the regular school system and curriculum in Croatia.'**

# Reading Istria

Jonathan Bousfield blazes Istria's literary trail.

**HE CHOSE AN ISLAND** in the Adriatic, not far off the Istrian coast... But the air was heavy, it rained, the hotel guests were provincial and Austrian, and he missed that close, calming contact with the sea that only a beach of soft sand can provide. It wasn't exactly the place he had been looking for.'

Thus begins the holiday of middle-aged professor Gustav von Aschenbach, protagonist of Thomas Mann's celebrated novella *Death in Venice*. By far the best-known literary description of the Istrian island of Brijuni, it is hardly the glowing endorsement the local tourist board might have wanted. Thomas Mann visited Brijuni with his wife in May 1911, but soon tired of the place and headed for the city of canals and gondolas instead. Here Mann came across the people and places that inspired the rest of his story. And instead of writing a book that might have gone down in history as *Life on Brijuni*, he wrote *Death in Venice* instead.

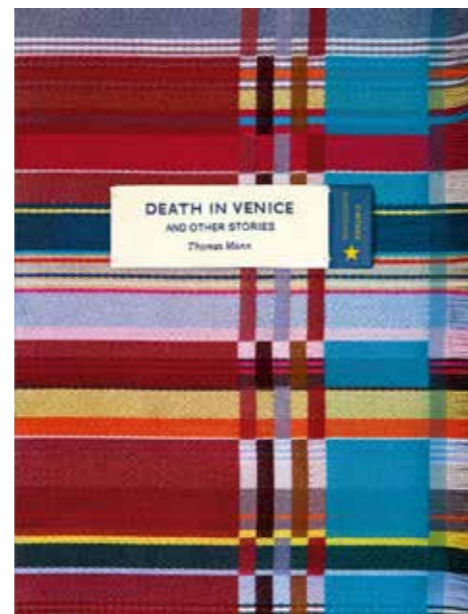
The idea of a grumpy old Mann fleeing everyone else's idea of paradise is an appropriately ambiguous introduction to Istria's fleeting presence in world literature. The peninsula certainly boasts enough bookish references to keep the guide-book writers happy: fourteenth-century scribe Dante mentions the scattered graveyards of Pula in the *Divine Comedy*, Jules Verne uses Pazin as a location in his 1885 adventure *Mathias Sandorf*, and James Joyce famously spent the winter of 1904-5 teaching English to Austrian navy officers in Pula. However Dante lived a rather long time ago, and there is no evidence

he actually visited Pula in person. We know for sure that Jules Verne never set foot in Pazin, relying instead on postcards sent to him by the local mayor. James Joyce did spend six months in Pula but his dislike of the city is legendary, his letters describing the place as 'a back-of-God-speed place - a naval Siberia'. Istria for Joyce was 'a long boring place wedged into the Adriatic, peopled by ignorant Slavs who wear red caps and colossal breeches.' The locals were at least forgiving enough to give Joyce a statue, which can be seen sitting outside the Uliks ("Ulysses") café in the centre of Pula.

The habitual belittlement and humiliation of the Istrian people inspired Croatian writer Vladimir Nazor to produce the one work of literature with which almost all locals identify. Veli Jože ("Big Joe") is the tale of a tall gangly Istrian peasant who is exploited and abused by Italian-speaking masters. Big-hearted Jože refuses to go under, and in Nazor's hands becomes a metaphor for the quiet dignity of Istria's long-suffering countryfolk. Intended as a patriotic fable for children and young adults, Veli Jože may well contain lessons for the contemporary foreigner too: never underestimate the Croats, especially when playing them at football. Veli Jože was translated into English by Martin Mayhew for Rijeka's Naklada Kvarner in 2015, although it's quite hard to get hold of.

Slightly easier to find is British novelist Tony White's underrated travelogue *Another Fool in the Balkans* (2006), one of those perceptive and offbeat books that offer something of an antidote to the straw-hatted, Zorba-ate-my-donkey narratives that blight English-language travel writing elsewhere. It devotes a good ninety pages to Istria and stands up very well as an informed and sympathetic travel companion. When it comes to Pula, White is intrigued by the James Joyce connections but doesn't allow them to lead him astray, embarking instead on an unorthodox agenda of his own. He goes off in search of Pula's historic cinemas, tracks down Seventies' movie star Igor Galo, and props up the bar at the cult café of local boxing legend Mate Parlov. Each of these quests reveals aspects of the city that other books rarely reach.

Elsewhere, there is no shortage of writers who have come to Istria in search of inspiration and gone home with a satchel full



of scribbles. It's just that they're not always available in the English language. There is however one great Istrian novel which does have an international reach, and it comes from a quarter that does not easily fit into the Croatian national canon. Here the subjects are not the Croats, but the Italians who were pressured to leave the peninsula after World War II. Fulvio Tomizza's *Materada* (named after the village between Buje and Umag where Tomizza was born) sets a bitter family land-feud against the backdrop of a society slowly being torn apart. Written in the style of an Italian Neo-realist film, *Materada* evokes the gritty, hard-working culture of the part-Italian, part-Croatian rural population. Significantly, it is set in the early years of communism and examines the ambiguities of the new order: the wily and the resourceful jump onto the bandwagon of

the new regime, while those who allow themselves the luxury of critical distance are manipulated or elbowed aside. Despite being a hit in Italy in the 1960s (where Tomizza had moved in 1954), *Materada* wasn't translated into Croatian until 1986. Hopefully, the English version (Northwestern University Press, 1999) is not too hard to get hold of - this is the one Istrian novel that is worth slipping into your travel bag.

**'Instead of writing a book that might have gone down in history as *Life on Brijuni*, he wrote *Death in Venice*'**



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# Music

Edited by Marc Rowlands  
timeout.com/croatia/music

**THE COAST OF ISTRIA** can rightly claim to be the earliest Croatian destination of the modern tourist era, its beautiful towns beaches made accessible to the elites of Europe via the country's first international rail connection. But in the century that's passed, improved transportation has gone on to reveal the whole of Croatia. Dubrovnik, Split and its islands took centre stage in the story of Croatian tourism, stealing the limelight from the sparkling northwestern peninsula.

All that began to change ten years ago with the arrival of the international festival scene in Pula. First came Outlook Festival, the leading global event of the UK-born bass music scene, which incorporates drum n' bass, reggae, dubstep and subgenres. Next, its sister festival Dimensions appeared with a swish lineup of world-conquering house and techno DJs. Not only did the music of these festivals draw global plaudits, but so did the festival site, Fort Punta Christo. Its sprawling arenas were enhanced with lights, sound and production that marked these events as the best in Croatia and among the greatest in Europe. And when the press started to publish pictures of the festivals opening concerts, held within the spectacular backdrop of the city's astonishingly well-preserved amphitheatre, readers were amazed. Pula's music festivals suddenly topped many's must-do lists. Within the decade, Pula became the third most googled place in Croatia behind Dubrovnik and Zagreb.

But the arrival of these two international events isn't the start or end of the story. Croatia's festival scene evolves every year. Istria's festival

Sea Star Festival

# The capital of bass

Marc Rowlands takes the long view of Istria's festival scene.



Outlook Festival



Outlook Festival

scene may well look different in future seasons, but it's essential to know that whatever shape it takes, it's one moulded not only by the last decade but by a 27-year history of homegrown efforts in the area.

'At the start of the 90s it was the only place you could hold festivals in Croatia,' says Vedran Meniga, whose Seasplash reggae festival is very much Croatia's own precursor to Outlook and has been held in Pula since 2003. It was his expertise in holding the event which led to the arrival of the two international festivals and to his Pozitivan Ritam organisation becoming partners in both. 'In the rest of the country there was war, but in Istria, there was no armed conflict, so this was the natural starting point.'

Born in Šibenik, Meniga had moved to Zagreb to attend university in the '90s, where he formed Abrakha-Dub-R, one of Croatia's first dub reggae bands. Touring internationally, his musical path led him to Monte Paradiso in Pula, a punk festival which, at 27 years old, is Croatia's longest running. After becoming involved with its organisers and then its production, his experiences, coupled with his enthusiasm for reggae, inspired him to found the reggae-dedicated Seasplash in the same city.

'That was our background,' he says, 'DIY, punk rock. We just applied that to reggae and dub. The starting point for doing so had been what was happening in the UK, with punk bands

like The Clash, Ruts and Stiff Little Fingers bringing reggae into their sound.'

Contacts Meniga made while touring internationally were invited to contribute to Seasplash's first event in Pula in the late '90s. Audiences were attracted from not only the nearby locale, but from all over war-ravaged Croatia, plus Italy and Slovenia. The template was set.

'After seven or eight years of Seasplash we received a request from the UK organisers of Outlook Festival,' he remembers. 'They'd had a disappointing second year and most of the problems had come about because of their new site in Novalja which they'd moved to from their first near Zadar. They called us to Pag for help with some aspects of the production, lights, backline, technicians and so on. We did our bit, but at the end, I saw that they were still not satisfied with the location. So, I invited them to come to Pula to see what we had been doing there. When they did, they decided immediately that they wanted to continue in Pula.'

The festival site at Fort Punta Christo was not without its difficulties. But Meniga had already held Seasplash in three different locations in Pula. With Pozitivan Ritam's help, Outlook held a very successful first year in the city.

'In 1993 when we first started there were no venues, no music media. Everything had been destroyed,' says Meniga, who was the original promoter to present Fort Punta Christo as an event space at the first Seasplash festival. 'That's one reason we started to look at old forts, three or four around Pula, and to clean them up. Today, if you look at a tourist map or website for Pula, one of the first things you will see is Fort Punta Christo. Before 1993, it wasn't even on the map. In that time, people were using it as a garbage dump, taking its stones to build new houses.'

From an unused and forgotten site on the city's outskirts, Fort Punta Christo became the



Sea Star Festival

pula +

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global centre for the UK-derived bass music scene. Although this massively popular youth movement had regular club nights, it had no dedicated festival, no annual focal point and nowhere for a growing number of international fans to experience this sound. With Outlook's arrival at Fort Punta Christo, all of that changed. Its success ensured sister event Dimensions was a more than viable expansion and the attention lavished on the amphitheatre's opening concerts put the venue on the world stage; its track record of holding opera and folk concerts has now grown to include visits from some of rock music's big hitters, such as Pink Floyd's David Gilmour and, in 2019, the Foo Fighters.

The festival scene is a transitory and ever-evolving beast and this year, Pula's event calendar is changing. For the first time since the '90s, Seasplash will not be held in Pula,

but in Šibenik. This surprise has been added to by announcements from both Outlook and Dimensions that 2019 will be their final year at Fort Punta Christo. Although this news was shocking, there are many reasons to be hopeful about Istria's festival future. Not only is there a summer of riotous fun to be had at the last Outlook and Dimensions events, but Meniga is adamant that this is not the end for Pula as a host for world-class festivals. His glowing smile when discussing the future of a city he's operated in for almost 30 years is reason enough to be optimistic. 2019 also sees the city of Umag, in northern Istria, host the third Sea Star Festival, its organisers from Serbia's Exit Festival helping to attract many thousands of visitors to the city. Istria's standing as one of Europe's key festival and live music locations looks more than assured.



Sea Star Festival

## TOP FIVE FESTIVALS IN ISTRIA

### Labyrinth Open

It looks as though the popular annual edition of this Belgian franchise might be skipping a year from its usual site in Omiš, Dalmatia. But ravers can console themselves with this new event in Poreč which promises 36 hours of non-stop techno. The event will use several locations in the town, beginning on Friday night at club Byblos with an extended session featuring Pan-Pot, aka German duo Tassilo Ippenberger and Thomas Benedix. They will be joined there by compatriot and Berghain resident Marcel Fenger. Getting the headliners out of the way first is a good idea, because the length of this continuous party may require too much stamina for some. The party moves to the beach for the daylight hours of Saturday, making it perhaps the country's first outdoor dance music event of the season. It heads back indoors at club Zodiak for Saturday night and Sunday morning. Also appearing on the bill are lots of homegrown DJs including Mozer, Bronski and Andrea Ljekaj  
→ Various Venues, Poreč (facebook.com/labyrinthopen). April 26-28.

### Sea Star Festival

Though Croatia gets lots of plaudits for its summertime dance music festivals, there's no denying that one of the biggest success stories of the region is Exit Festival, held annually in Novi Sad, Serbia. These guys know a thing or two about putting on an attention-grabbing festival that draws an international audience and so it was no surprise to see them try their hand at staging an event in Umag. Successful previous editions in 2017 and 2018 brought the likes of The Prodigy to their grand stage which lies in the shadow of the venue where the famous ATP Croatia Open is held, with approximately 80,000 visitors from Italy, Slovenia, Austria, the UK and all over Croatia attending the weekend, many filling hotel rooms in the nearby Stella Maris resort. This year's event sees German trance-techno legend Sven Väth and Nina Kraviz appear as headliners.  
→ Stella Maris Resort, Umag (seastarfestival.com). May 24-25.

### Lighthouse Festival

This Austrian brand has looked unsettled since arriving in Croatia, as though still searching for the perfect home. Indeed, rumours abound they're moving to Obonjan island in Dalmatia. Though the lineup for their 2019 event is yet to be revealed, the location is still Lanterna, at the tip of a peninsula between Novigrad and Poreč. The site is one of the best in Croatia for beach parties, with dancers dipping in and out of the ocean enjoying spectacular sunsets as a backdrop to the beats. Organisers

also hold a beautiful-looking event in Cape Town, South Africa, so they really know how to choose a good spot for a shindig. With previous editions having brought the likes of Blawan, Dopplereffekt, Egyptian Lover, Jeff Mills, Black Coffee, Jackmaster, Kenny Larkin, Martin Buttrich, Gerd Janson, Jeremy Uunderground, DJ Koze, Axel Boman, Juan Atkins and Rodriguez Jr, you should expect nothing less than the very best in underground techno, house and electro.  
→ Lanterna, Poreč (lighthousefestival.tv). May 29-June 2.

### Dimensions Festival

Celebrating its final year at Fort Punta Christo and Pula Arena (though not necessarily their final year in Istria or Pula), expect Dimensions to pull out all the stops for the end of a thrilling chapter in Istria's festival scene. 2019 sees the



Dimensions Festival



Sea Star Festival

is no more important annual fixture than Outlook. Not only is the festival significant for this youth movement, it is also the starting point for positioning Pula as one of the most famous destinations in Croatia. Like Dimensions, it waves goodbye to Fort Punta Christo and Pula Arena this year after a decade of hedonistic antics. Chase & Status, Bugzy Malone, Goldie (live) and dBridge are among the main site headliners with Andy C, Shy FX (live), Gentleman's Dub Club and Mala performing at the opening concert in the Amphitheatre. Grooverider, LTJ Bukem, Calibre and Randall represent drum n' bass at the main site, grime and rap contributors include Ghetts, D Double E, Aitch and Unknown T, with Channel One Soundsystem, Iratton Steppas and Sister Nancy & Legal Shot Sound being among the reggae contingent. Also appearing are DJ Zinc, My Nu Leng & Dread MC, Joker, Matt Jam Lamont, Chimpo, MC Fox, Chunky and MC DRS, DJ Rap and Holy Goof.  
→ Fort Punta Christo, Stinjan near Pula (outlookfestival.com). Sept 4-9.

likes of Omar-S, Peggy Gou, Nina Kraviz, Joy Orbison, Helena Hauff, dBridge, Gilles Peterson, Call Super, Andrew Weatherall and Craig Richards play at the fort, while the arena opening concert will be handled by Objekt, Hunee and headliner Jeff Mills who will incorporate Afrobeat rhythm pioneer Tony Allen into his live performance. Alternative sounds on-site come from Sadar Bahar, Awesome Tapes From Africa and Mr. Scruff, pummeling techno from Blawan and DVS1, electro from DJ Stingray and DJ Bone plus DMX Krew and Radioactive Man, both of whom will perform live. Other live acts appearing include Larry Heard aka Mr. Fingers, Octave One and Dam-Funk.  
→ Fort Punta Christo, Stinjan, near Pula (dimensionsfestival.com). Aug 28-Sept 2.

### Outlook Festival

When it comes to bass music, the UK-derived scene that incorporates garage, dubstep, hip-hop, dub, drum 'n' bass and reggae, there really



Outlook Festival

# Shopping & Style

## Made in Istria

Add these beautiful Istrian products to your shopping list.

### STAŠA

Staša Doblanović was born and raised in Pula, where her mother's position as a costume designer piqued her interest in textiles from an early age. She created her own brand STAŠA in 2013 while still a student. Her contemporary womenswear uses minimalist, clean and geometric cuts. The designs are inspired by everything from modern architecture to contemporary Asian fashion and made sustainably in Labin and Pula. Her clothing has won awards in Croatia, been featured at London Fashion Week and graced the pages of British fashion bibles Vogue and Glamour.



### Iva Stojković

Pula resident Iva Stojković opened her funky jewellery business in 2009, releasing three collections using plexiglass and three newer collections of 'light' jewellery. This is upcycling at its best - the materials she uses are often cast-off pieces of materials used by industry which Iva turns into beautiful and imaginative designs. Her jewellery is available at outlets in Rovinj, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, and at her own store Komo which opened in Pula in 2014. There she sells selected clothes, home décor, accessories and jewellery, most of which is designed and made in Croatia. New to her shelves is Komo's in-house brand of the same name, which sells belts, bracelets, bags and other accessories, all designed by Iva.



### Karlič Truffella blanc

The Karlič family's truffle business was established in 1966 from Paladini near Buzet, the skills for sourcing the local delicacy passed down from grandfather to daughter and now to the third generation, who continue to expand their catalogue of truffle-based products. Aside from selling fresh, preserved and frozen family-sourced truffles, the family also make liquor, oils, sausages, pates, cheese and honey infused with black or white truffles. In 2015, the company became the first in the world to manufacture a white chocolate and truffle spread, thanks to the home experiments of sweet-toothed son Ivan. There's a dark chocolate version available too.

### Koza

When looking for an outlet for her handmade accessories, Zagreb-born Dora Zoričić and brother Velibor fell in love with the Istrian seaside town of Poreč, bought a house and opened their store on the ground floor in 2006. They spend much of the summer season there, attracting the attention of visitors with Dora's eye-catching designs, which she usually makes in the workshop at their newer Zagreb outlet. Totally handmade, her designs are often inspired by the shapes of leather she obtains, often not knowing just what she'll make until she holds the raw materials in her hands.



# Eating

Edited by Justin McDonnell  
timeout.com/croatia/restaurants

## Istria in ten dishes

On the coast or inland, Istria's fresh, seasonal dishes from the sea and the fields attract carloads of Italians over the border at weekends. Here's ten dishes you shouldn't leave Istria without trying.

**GASTRONOMY IS A WAY** of life in Istria, its peasant traditions, fresh, seasonal ingredients and inventive chefs combining to make this small peninsula the destination of choice for epicureans. Italians flood across the border on Sundays to sample the best of it. The celebrated use of truffles, to season steaks or added to chocolate cake, is only one example of the sophisticated dishes on offer.

Although good food can be found in most towns, resorts and villages, even remote outposts, certain establishments put the whole package together – ingredients, expertise, service and setting – to produce something truly memorable.

Here local produce means local, best illustrated amid the stand-out restaurants in the gastronomic hub around the modest communities of Brtonigla and Buje.

### Truffles

Istria is all about truffles: look out for restaurants with the 'tartufo vero' sign, which means they've met Istria's high standards for handling and serving the delicacy. In Livade, weekends in October see the judging of the best truffle, cookery classes and truffle auctions: it is also home to Istria's most famous truffle restaurant, Zigante.



### Mussels

Fresh mussels can be delivered to most restaurant tables in Istria within an hour or two. These are then prepared buzara-style, which is to say gently in white wine, olive oil, garlic and fresh herbs, not a thousand miles, in culinary terms at least, from the French moules marinières. Sea truffles are usually cooked in the same way, although scallops, particularly around Novigrad, are grilled and served au gratin.

### Pršut

Usually offered as a starter, ham (pršut) is a real Istrian speciality, air-cured thanks to the chilling bora wind. Look out, too, for kobasice, succulent sausages, not for the faint-hearted.



### Oysters

Croatian oysters have a more intense flavour than their Atlantic counterpart. The most renowned varieties come from the Limski kanal in Istria. The adventurous traveller will be rewarded by finding casual vendors purveying divine oysters by the side of the road or from a makeshift outlet, as fresh as it gets. These are also sold on the spot, and swallowed down with a dash of lemon.



### Steak

Inland restaurants are generally meat-oriented, menus listing steaks, veal, lamb and ombolo, pork loin, a local favourite.



### Fritule

Little battered doughnut balls dusted with powdered sugar and filled with rum and raisins. Different households may add a touch of lemon zest or grated orange peel here and there, but the key here is sharing. Mention must be made of top-quality Istrian honey, a speciality around Motovun and Livade.



### Fritaja

Similar to Istrian fish and meat, fresh seasonal greens are worth writing home about. If you're here in the spring, don't miss out on wild asparagus, often served fritaja, chopped up and mixed with scrambled eggs.



### Supa

Part nutrition, part drink and 100 percent traditional is supa, a warm red wine, usually Teran, mulled with olive oil, sugar and black pepper, and presented in an earthenware jug with slightly overtoasted bread used for dunking.



### Maneštra

Other greens will appear in maneštra, a vegetable soup not dissimilar to minestrone, though vegetarians should beware that some chefs also chuck some meat into the pot.



### Boškarin

This Istrian ox was a beast of burden, having ploughed fields for generations. At some point in the 1990s, its numbers barely reached three figures. Then, with the revival of the regional wine and olive-oil industries, a few adventurous farmers began to turn once more to the traditional, grey, long-horned cattle their forefathers would have reared. Top restaurants began to feature it on their menus, usually served with classic Istrian pasta varieties such as fuži (noodle twists), pljukanci (thin tubes) and njoki (gnocchi).



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# Food, glorious food

Istria is packed with culinary events to satisfy all palates

**ISTRIA'S FAMOUS GASTRONOMY** offers some of the best wines, olive oils, truffles, seafood and cured meats that you'll ever try! Produced in this bountiful region over centuries, Istrians hand down traditional methods of production, ensuring quality remains at a constant premium. Working traditionally means Istrians are constantly aware of the changing seasons and their produce emerges at various times of the calendar. Such occasions are celebrated with seasonal festivals which are sometimes as ancient as the methods of production themselves. Istria's food and drink festivals often entertain the full family with their attached entertainment programmes. The following highlights from the region are ones which should not-to-be-missed.



The Festival of Wild, Edible and Medicinal Plants

## The Festival of Wild, Edible and Medicinal Plants

Lectures and workshops provide a fascinating educational side to this event, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. Experts offer tips in cultivation, extraction and the medicinal use of plants and herbs, and there are plenty of tasty recipes to try in the kitchen. Take home some of the all-natural products, purchased directly from the passionate producers who make them. Most are more than happy to talk to you about their wares and how they should be used.

→ Kršan, date (April)

## Šparogada

For fans of the delicacy, that this is an asparagus festival is all you'll need to know to ensure a visit. But, even if asparagus is not your favourite vegetable, Šparogada's fantastic cultural and sports programme should entice you. Take part in Boćanje (boules) or table tennis tournaments,



Šparogada

or let the children join in special activities. There's something for every generation here, with hiking and a fun run engaging those happiest being active. Compete in an asparagus picking competition or watch the closely fought one for the longest asparagus. If you prefer a more leisurely pace, walk around the stalls sampling asparagus-based dishes made by local caterers. For many, the event's highlight is the music programme where you can usually watch some top-flight Croatian pop and rock bands alongside some fantastic traditional musics like klapa.

→ Kaštel, early April

## Vinistra wine festival

You owe it to yourself to get to know Istria's wines and this event, which is the largest international wine festival held in Croatia, is the perfect place to do so. Rub shoulders with people who really know their wine, meet producers and see the displays of the latest

winemaking equipment. Try some of the olive oils and spirits which are also evaluated here. The main event is naturally the wine and some of Croatia's greatest come from Istria. Take a sip of each variety they make here and learn why Istrian wine is globally recognised. Cold, cured meats and cheeses are paired with the wines and this local produce is the perfect accompaniment.

→ Poreč, every May

## Festival of Istrian maneštra

Beneath the smiles and theatre you'll see on Gračišće's main square lies a seriously fought competition. Depending on the season and availability of ingredients, the traditional dish of Maneštra can be a wildly varied affair, and recipes can be argued about eternally. Pulses, vegetables, meats and herbs feature prominently in this thick stew/soup, which may remind you of a superior minestrone. Arrive early in the afternoon if you want to learn the secret family recipes and methods employed, or arrive later, at the end of several hours cooking, if you just want to judge the results. The dishes are usually finished just in time for dinner in the evening.

→ Gračišće, in June

## The Festival of Istrian pasta

After visiting here, you'll have no doubts about pasta's rightful place in Istrian cuisine. Learn to make traditional and local pasta shapes from dab hands at the workshops or try pasta dishes made by excellent chefs who utilise a full range of Istrian produce, including seafood, meats and vegetables. Snack on local cheeses and cured meats while sipping Istrian wine. Istria's olive oil are globally recognised for their quality and you'll see why when tasting the range on offer here. Best of all, you can take home with you much of what you try here. Held in a time of year when the weather is always fine, you will enjoy being outdoors at this event, with family or friends, the festival being particularly pretty as the evening draws in as much of it is lit with lamps and candles.

→ Zminj, during July,



The Festival of Istrian pasta



Truffle Days in Buzet, Livade and Motovun

**Truffle Days in Buzet, Livade and Motovun**

Marvel at the finds of this year's truffle hunting season and celebrate this ancient and elusive delicacy within an area famed for such. One of the most prestigious ingredients of world gastronomy, truffles are a commonplace ingredient of Istrian cooking, available on the menu year-round at many of the regions specialised restaurants. At Truffle Days, the whole of Istria's truffle culture is condensed into one event, so here you can learn all about truffles as well as sample dishes and products which use both the black and white variety, both of which are sourced within eyesight of the event's site. Regular dishes such as pasta dishes will delight, others such as truffle flavoured ice cream might come as more of a surprise, as will some of the prices reached at the auction of particularly grand specimens.

→ September / autumn

**Subotina Festival**

This festival stretches back longer than the memory of its oldest attendees. You won't fail to be fascinated and touched by this heartwarming example of a community's determination to pay tribute and keep alive distinct folkloric traditions. Locals dress in traditional costume, some singing and dancing to music unique from the region, while artisans demonstrate carpentry, stonemasonry, basket-weaving and other traditional skills. The culinary highlight of this September festival sees a giant omelette, using a huge amount of locally sourced truffles, prepared for one and all on the town's square.

→ Buzet, September

**Chestnut Fair**

Walk around any Croatian town in autumn or winter and the aroma of roasting chestnuts is bound to hit you at some point, the scent usually coming from an outdoor vendor who braves the cold all season. Now in its eleventh year, the Chestnut Fair in Oprtalj encourages residents to harvest this nut which grows abundantly in the locale. Not only does this help them add to their household income, it also contributes over a ton of chestnuts to this event's proceedings. And you get to try the results! Munch on a variety of chestnut based cakes and desserts or buy a range of products which are derived from the nut. Other seasonal food options are also available at the event for those of you who aren't nutty about nuts.

→ Oprtalj

**International Prosciutto Festival**

Now in its 13th year, the International Prosciutto Festival in Tinjan is one of the leading events of its kind not just in Croatia but also in the region. As you wander around vendors slicing thin strips off boned meat, you'll be able to see producers from Italy, Slovenia, Germany, Austria, Spain and all over Croatia. Most will advise that the cured delicacy is best experienced with a glass of wine and



International Prosciutto Festival

maybe some fine cheese. Luckily, Istria has bucketloads of both, not least at this occasion. Istrian people refer to prosciutto as vijulin, meaning violin and they prize their local variety above all others, thanks to its taste, smell, colour, texture and freshness. To work off some of the calories you might acquire here, take part in the programme of sports, culture and entertainment which accompanies the festival. The programme engages attendees of all ages and interests.

→ Tinjan

**Istrian Grappa Fair**

As well as famously being called the smallest town in the world, Hum is known as a producer of medicinal grappa, a sharp drink, strong in alcohol, which is made from mistletoe and herbs. Locally, the town is also famous for holding the Istrian Grappa Fair. This year's event is its 19th annual edition and here you can try homemade grappa/rakija/brandy made from a variety of ingredients including cherry, quince, plum, grape, honey and walnut, as well as the famous and unique local versions.

→ Hum, October

**Days of New Olive Oil**

Prior to Christmas and Advent festivities, which are celebrated all across Istria (and quite spectacularly so in Poreč), Istria's last main gastro fest of the year comes in the form of the Days of New Olive Oil. Istrian olive oil is frequently cited as the world's best and the

very same connoisseurs who say so will often speak with passion about an oil's freshness holding the secret to its superiority. Here you'll learn just why. The small city of Vodnjan is the centre of olive oil production in the area and even if you're not a connoisseur you'll recognise that there's something extra special about tasting the year's new product, fresh from the press. Celebrating 15 years in 2019,

the event offers opportunity to taste a huge variety of oils and many dishes which use it. You can watch cooking masterclasses, and be refreshed by the beers and wines which are paired with what's on offer. An accompanying sports programme will help you warm up, should the bite of winter have started to nip in the night air.

→ Vodnjan, November



Days of New Olive Oil

# Karlič – the home of the truffle

A family industry dating back more than 50 years, Karlič now offers visitors the year-round opportunity to go on an authentic truffle hunt, as well as pick up quality produce created on-site.



**TRUFFLES ARE** more than just a sought-after delicacy, a fungus found in dark forests, haggled over then sprinkled on steak or pasta. In Istria, they're a lucrative industry. Not only that, but it's an industry of family-run businesses, know-how passed down from generation to generation. And not just between humans – dogs, too, have to be trained for very specific tasks that provide locals with a livelihood.

It's one thing to sit in a traditional tavern, or konoba, and order a classic Istrian dish fuži pasta twists, say, and savour the flavour of those quality shaved truffles on top – but another to appreciate the work that's gone into putting them on your plate.

A visit to the Karlič Estate in Paladini, near Buzet, deep in truffle country, should change all that.

More than just proffering truffle honey, truffle paste, Istrian sausage with truffles, truffle butter and special truffle graters, not to mention loose truffles by the gram (white

ones by the kilo run into thousands of euros, black ones hundreds), the Karlič family lays on year-round truffle hunts, an outdoor adventure that brings home just what this whole business involves. Surrounded by sun-dappled forest, this hunt for hidden treasure is both exhilarating and satisfying as the truffle dogs sniff out their prey. Two hours later, you're back around the dining table looking forward to a delicious feast concocted with the day's catch.

It was back in 1966 when a certain Ivan Rašpolić set up in this venerable trade. He would head out into the woods, taking his ten-year-old daughter, now Mrs Radmila Karlič, with him, and the pair of them would go hunting for truffles. At the time, the Motovun Forest, where these white and black pearls were found, was considerably more extensive than today – and there

were fewer locals looking around them with dogs and torches.

Nearly 20 years later, around the time of Croatian independence, Radmila and her husband Goran set up their own company to continue the tradition established by her parents, Ivan and Danica, and uncle Lucijano. As the business grew, so did the family, and now the third generation of Ivan, Ivana and others are very much part of it.

The team is augmented by 12 dogs of various breeds, all hardy, and all trained from the age of three months. By burying the truffle at various depths, the dog learns how to dig it up by using its paws rather than its nose, a painstaking process of tuition and reward that moves seamlessly from play time to serious work.

Just as the Karlič brand has expanded and developed, so

**'The Karlič family lays on year-round truffle hunts, an outdoor adventure that brings home just what this whole business involves'**



nearby Buzet has become the City of Truffles, with major festivals and annual events alongside the regular year-round trade as far as black truffles are concerned. As for white truffles, they are only in season from September until January.

This makes autumn the ideal time to come to Buzet. After an enlightening visit to the Karlič Estate in Paladini, you can join in the fun when

locals cook up the world's largest frittata truffle omelette, using more than 2,000 eggs and 10kg of truffles. The frying pan alone weighs 1,000kg. Held at the focal point of Trg Fontana on the second weekend of September, just before the religious holiday of Saint Maria Mala, the so-called Subotina is the curtain-raiser for the season-long Truffles Days, a culinary event

promoting the region's produce and cuisine, first staged in 2002.

If you're looking for somewhere to rest your head after the hunt, the four-star Villa Maslina has a view of swirling olive trees and accommodates up to 12 guests. For smaller groups, there are truffle-themed apartments that feel as rustic and welcoming as the family home.



# Drinking

Edited by Justin McDonnell  
timeout.com/croatia/bars

# Bottoms up

Pacta Connect's Judith Burns drinks to ten years of recognition for Istrian wine.

**CROATIA HIT** the wine world in a spectacular way in 2019, winning eight gold medals in Decanter's World Wine Awards (to Chile's four and Argentina's seven).

Suddenly Croatia was hailed as 'a major force' and 'a serious player in the wine world', which caused a huge stir and scratching of heads amongst wine journalists and consultants, sommeliers and general wine geeks. Croatia? Who knew?

Already enjoying half a decade in Istria tasting crisp citrusy or floral whites and mellow or earthy reds our research had taken us to

hidden-away woodland wineries and Adriatic coastal vineyards, and we'd steeped ourselves in local fairs and festivals.

So what have we seen change in the last ten years?

Prices have become a bit more realistic. In 2009, Istrian winemakers weren't used to British pricing with our high levels of alcohol duty and tax and the competition on our shelves. With high prices from the cellars, we knew we wouldn't appeal to a mass market with these wines, although we were delighted when Marks

& Spencer asked us to source an Istrian malvazija for them.

Producers have become proud again of their own vinous identity, no longer planting lots of international varieties but concentrating on their indigenous, local grapes of which they should be so proud.

Some growers (for better or worse) have built futuristic wineries, Napa Valley style, leaving behind

traditional values, but wherever it's made we've watched younger producers overtake 'old hands', producing really confident wines, taking branding and labelling into consideration, looking at their niche in the market and filling the gaps.

We've delighted in seeing quite timid winemakers becoming a tour de force on the international

**'Italians still queue at the border at weekends driving in to buy Istrian wines direct from the vineyards.'**

market. Degrees and diplomas in viticulture, oenology, business and marketing are all taking a younger breed of Istrian winemakers into a new dimension in the international wine world and it shows.

Wine tourism has flourished; brown signs point to wineries and wine trails. Within their vineyards Cattunar has built a wine hotel at Brtonigla; Meneghetti has gone for the Istrian farmhouse look; both offer different styles of wine-steeped luxury.

In more recent years we've even enjoyed well-made charmat-method sparkling wines!

Italians still queue at the border at weekends driving in to buy Istrian wines direct from the vineyards, as well as olive oils, wild mushrooms, truffles and asparagus.

Ten years on we still enjoy Istrian wine to drink something different - wines that taste of the place and that pair so well with Istria's superb local produce.



## Top five Istrian wines

**THE AROMAS** and tastes of each grape variety will vary depending on the location of the vineyard, the soil (usually red or white clay) that it's grown on, the wine's age and how it's been made in the winery. But typically, here's a list of some of the characteristics you might find on smelling the aromas and tasting the wines.



### REFOŠK (red)

Lighter red, fruity, mossy, blackberries, vegetation and hedgerow  
**PAIRING** Pršut, salami, hard cheeses, tomato-based sauces with pasta or gnocchi



### TERAN (red)

Earthy, bloody (like a freshly cut steak!), dark fruit, mulberries, iron, putty  
**PAIRING** Barbecue and grills, beef steaks, sausages



### ISTRIAN MALVAZIJA (white)

(Malvazija istarska) Dry, fresh, citrusy and salty or more floral, with aromas of white flowers, nettles and honeysuckle.  
**PAIRING** Adriatic seafood and fish (try scallops and baby sole)



### CHARMAT METHOD SPARKLING

Okay, we're cheating... it's not a grape 'perse' but some wineries where recently there's been more formal training are now producing delicious charmat method sparkling wines from the grape Istrian malvazija.  
**PAIRING** For celebrations and an aperitif; or match to antipasti, shellfish and fish dishes



### WHITE MUŠKAT (dessert white)

(Muškati bijeli momjanski) Off-dry, soft, lighter dessert wine (nothing like a sticky sweet Tokaji), notes of elderflower, nettles, lychees.  
**PAIRING** Soft blue cheeses, pears, fruit flans, apple fritule (dumplings)

## HOW TO... Become an Istrian wine expert

### 1 Follow the brown signs

They are everywhere, with the names of wineries and wine roads to take.

### 2 Do your research

Pick up a copy of the Istrian Tourist Board's gastronomic guide published annually. It's not definitive but it's a good starting point.

### 3 Knock on wood

You'll see handmade written and painted 'Vino' signs everywhere, from a farm gate to the front door of a family house. They may also sell olive oil, honey and even home-made cheese.

### 4 What you see is what you get

Remember a lot of producers make wine for friends and family; it's often simply easy-drinking table wine. The size of the winery, investment in tanks, barrels, equipment, bottles and branding will show you what kind of wine it is.

### 5 Taste and then buy

If you rock up, enjoy a tour and a tittle with some Istrian hospitality, please buy something - this shouldn't be about enjoying a free drink, in many cases, it's their livelihood. Show your appreciation.

### 6 Practice the language

Although many speak English, trying your language skills will go a long way to please. Practice the basics in Croatian. Speaking Italian will usually work too.

### 7 Turn water into wine

Don't be afraid to ask if you can fill up your empty water bottle straight from the tank. Many wineries are set up for this, watch the locals arriving with empty five-litre bottles.

### 8 Go back to school

Most wineries offer group tastings. Around 100 kuna gets you an educational and informative

chat about the wines including a tasting flight paired with a platter of cheeses, salami, pršut and usually delicious home-made olive oil and bread. Phone ahead to book.

### 9 Sleuth some hidden gems

Ask for local wine tips in a local konoba (restaurant). They will often serve their friends' or family's wines by the carafe. If you enjoy it, see if you can find out who produced it, then go and visit them to buy direct.

### 10 Always be respectful

Remember a wine tasting is just that. It's not an excuse to quaff in quantity. Finally, remember to have a designated driver amongst you. Croatian drink driving laws are strict: Zero tolerance policy for drivers under 25 (blood alcohol level of 0%), and 0.5% BAC for drivers over 25.

VINA  FAKIN



Fakin wines are a blend of commitment and experience, passed through generations at our family winery in Motovun. Taste the flavours of our fresh Malvazija, our aged Teran and Malvazija and our sparkling Chamal and come meet the family.

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*Once in Istria,  
let's do the wines!*

Do you want to experience something special and authentic? Hint of real Istria in a glass? Hear the funny story of passion and devotion? Visit our wine cellar and join us for a tasting!

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**MATOŠEVIĆ**  
WINES OF ISTRIA



# A taste of history



# ARMAN

M A R I J A N A R M A N



**THE 25 ACRES** of vineyard and wine cellar belonging to Arman Marijan wines have been in our family for over 200 years. Current owner Marijan is the fifth generation of Arman producing wine on the southern slopes of the Mirna river, located near Poreč, Istria, passing the family experience and tradition down to his daughters Ines and Nina.

Having evolved into a fully modernised boutique winery, the

heart of our estate is composed of a wine cellar, tasting room and open terrace with amazing views over our vineyards, where you can taste our 14 different labels. Our white varieties include Malvasia, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and White Muskat, our red grapes, Teran, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

Our flagship wine, which holds the impeccable Vižinada terroir seal, is our Malvasia Grand Crud,

which was recognised as the best young Malvasia 2018 on the world Malvasia competition at the Vinistra fair in Poreč.

The expert knowledge of our ancestors inspires everything we do, from the skilful blending of varieties to produce our Cuvee Superior (made of Teran, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot), and our Cuvee Superior Blanc (made of Malvasia, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc) to the love

and attention we lavish on our terroir and grapes, all of which are pruned, weeded, trimmed and picked by hand.

Our careful and traditional winemaking process, coupled with contemporary ideas and equipment, helps us produce some 80,000 bottles of award-winning wine every year, a thirty percent minimum demanded by export.

→ [www.arman.hr](http://www.arman.hr), [info@arman.hr](mailto:info@arman.hr)



# Olive oil

Edited by Justin McDonnell  
timeout.com/croatia/restaurants



## Liquid gold

Isabel Putinja praises the Mediterranean staple and takes us on a tour of Istria's oil routes.

**ISTRIA IS OFTEN DESCRIBED** as the 'new Tuscany', its landscape of rolling hills, picturesque hilltop towns and excellent cuisine easily comparable to the continental Italian region. This tag is now slightly worn out, but it remains true that Istria's many charms and gastronomic delights do easily rival those of Tuscany's. Especially its exceptional olive oil. Olives have been cultivated on the Istrian peninsula and pressed for their precious oil since Roman times. The 1600-year-old olive tree on Veliki Brijuni island, off Istria's south-west coast, is a testimony to this long tradition, as are the ancient terracotta amphorae once used to transport and store the oil, which lie on display in the cellar of Pula's Roman amphitheatre. Despite this long tradition, Croatia is often overlooked as an olive oil-producing country. The quantity of olive oil it produces represents only a small drop compared to Spain, the world's largest producer. But Istria, which happens to be the Mediterranean's northern-most olive growing region, is now firmly on the olive map thanks to growing international recognition for its high-quality extra virgin olive oil. Istria has been named 'Best Olive Oil Region' by the 2019 Flos Olei olive oil guide, an honour the region has enjoyed for the fourth year in a row. The 2019 edition of this influential guide



lists 79 top Istrian olive oil producers. Most Istrian olive oil makers are small, family-run outfits producing very limited quantities of this 'liquid gold'. Though they can't compete with the quantity made by bigger Italian or Spanish producers, they make up for this by making truly exceptional oils, many of which are organic. In recent years Istrian producers have been collecting a growing number of international awards for their extra virgin olive oils. Out of the 40 Croatian oils that won awards at the 2018 New York International Olive Oil Competition, 29 were from Istria. Another marker of its high quality is the official appellation 'Istrian extra virgin olive oil' which is already protected at the national level since 2015 and will soon receive Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status at the EU level. This guarantees that all stages of the production process, from cultivation to processing and bottling and packaging, takes place in Istria. What's unique about Istria's olive oil is its delightfully fruity green notes and the pungent, peppery effect it has in the throat: a sure sign it's high in polyphenols – chemical compounds full of healthy antioxidants. While common Italian olive varieties like leccino and frantoio also grow here, Istria has plenty of its own native cultivars like istarska bjelica, buža, rošinjola, karbonaca and žizolera, to name just a few.

Quality is also influenced by the production process. Olives are picked early: just as they're starting to turn purple – this is essential to preserve their high polyphenol content - and then pressed within 24 hours using modern mechanised mills. Much like wine tourism, olive oil tourism is quickly expanding in Istria where signposted



**'Olives have been cultivated on the Istrian peninsula and pressed for their precious oil since Roman times'**



'olive oil routes' point visitors in the direction of local producers where they can sample and buy high-quality oils. Family-run olive farms like Chiavalon [chiavalon.hr] and Brist [brist-olive.hr] in Vodnjan, south Istria, offer guided tours of their groves followed by a tasting session of their oils. Tucked in the hills near Konstanjica in North Istria is one of the region's most scenic olive groves at B10 Istrian Fusion [b10.hr] which has jaw-dropping views of the Mirna valley from its tasting room. Those who want to try their hand at olive picking can join in the harvest in October and November at Aminess Laguna Hotel in Novigrad (producers of the award-winning Vergal oil) as part of a special tourist package.

In 2017, Istria got its own museum showcasing the importance of the peninsula as an olive-growing region. Located in Pula, Museum Olei Histriae (oleumhistriae.com) is an interactive museum dedicated to the 2000-year-old history of olive oil making in Istria. The multimedia exhibits share insights not only into history but also fascinating details like how amphorae were manufactured, the evolution of the olive press and milling process, and even facts about taxes and duties imposed on producers during the Venetian Republic. A visit is rounded off with an expert-led tasting experience of local oils, all of which are available to buy in the on-site shop.



## Five olive oils to take home

### 1 Chiavalon ExAlbis

The Chiavalon brothers' high-quality organic oils are on the tables of high-end restaurants across Croatia and are exported across the world. Their ExAlbis oil is a unique blend of five Istrian olive varieties: buža, crnica, Istarska Bjelica, rožinjola and morožola. With a perfect balance of bitterness and pungency (the hallmarks of a quality extra virgin oil), this is an excellent all-rounder.

→ [chiavalon.hr](http://chiavalon.hr)

### 2 Brist Exclusive Selection

Of Silvano Puhar's range of five extra virgin olive oils produced under the brand Brist, the Exclusive Selection stands out. This limited edition monovarietal oil is made of the Istrian buža olive, known for its intense and pungent flavour, and pressed from olives hand-picked from his family's oldest olive trees which are between 100 and 500 years old.

→ [brist-olive.hr](http://brist-olive.hr)

### 3 Oliva Lucia Select

Female entrepreneur and olive grower Mili Kus produces organic extra virgin oil in the fertile soil of north Istria, just a few kilometres from the Slovenian border. Her newly introduced Oliva Lucia Select is a blend of three oil varieties high in health-boosting polyphenols: istarska bjelica, moraiolo and frantoio. The result is an intense oil perfect for pairing with meat dishes, sauces and bold cheeses.

→ [oliva-lucia.net](http://oliva-lucia.net)

### 4 Terra Rossa

Three generations of the Bellani family work the red soil of their olive farm in the rolling hills of central Istria to produce Terra Rossa. This organic blend of five olive varieties: istarska bjelica, buža, pendolino, frantoio and leccino makes for a balanced extra virgin oil with a medium intensity that can be paired with most foods.

→ [terra-rossa.hr](http://terra-rossa.hr)

### 5 B10 First Night

Perched in the hilly landscape of north Istria, above Kostanjica, near the artists' town of Grožnjan, are the groves of B10 Istrian Fusion. Boris and Sanja Galić, a husband and wife team, produce a range of extra virgin monovarietals and blends under the brand name B10 First Night. This year they've introduced a monovarietal made of karbonaca, one of the older local cultivars.

→ [b10.hr](http://b10.hr)

# Chiavalon. The most awarded Croatian extra virgin olive oil in the World. An original Istrian product.

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# Chiavalon

Award-winning olive oil from a legacy estate.



**FROM SMALL ACORNS**, or rather olives, a huge globally successful business has grown. Sandi Chiavalon was only 13 years old when he started out, helping on his family's olive grove in Vodnjan, planting their first 100 olive trees.

Now, more than 20 years later, Chiavalon oversees nearly 8,000 olive trees, and export their award-winning extra virgin olive oil to more than a dozen countries around the world.

Sandi had learned his love of cultivation from his grandfather. When he was younger, as a small boy he would visit his grandfather's olive grove, then a modest plot of some 50 trees, all of them centuries old. After his grandfather passed away, there was no-one left to tend to them – until Sandi and his family set about bedding in new plants.

Inspired by his grandfather, Sandi took the work seriously. First graduating from the Agricultural School in Poreč then enrolling at the Faculty of Agriculture in Zagreb, Sandi gained the modern-day knowledge you need to set yourself up in this competitive business.

Olives have been cultivated in Istria since Roman times, and almost certainly even before then. Because of Istria's northerly latitude, olives ripen later and produce few acids. They are superior to those grown in, say, Dalmatia, in the south. Although each crop yields a relatively small quantity of oil, the quality of that oil is quite simply the finest.

Olives were traditionally harvested by shaking the boughs of the tree – or even the whole tree. Today, in many parts of the world, machines do the work. Here in Istria, handpicking is more common as the terrain is less suitable for machines – and because this produces a far better end result.

It is said that only olive oil from Istria – Terra Magica to the Romans – graced the tables of the Caesars. It was also exported across the Roman Empire.

After the Romans left, olive cultivation in Istria tailed off and an influx of cheap sunflower oil from Slavonia from the 1950s onwards

did the rest. A few family olive groves, such as Sandi's grandfather's, were all that remained.

The resurgence of world-class production from the mid-1990s, in tandem with the revival of Istria's wine industry, sprang from ambitious young producers such as Sandi Chiavalon. They not only saw this not only as a business opportunity but also as a chance to continue the work and respect the heritage of their forefathers.

Bringing in the agro-ecological technology learned in Zagreb, Chiavalon focused on the five indigenous olive varieties of the Vodnjan region: Buža, Bjelica, Crnica, Moražola and Rožinjola. Again, legacy was paramount in his planning.

Another crucial factor in Sandi's success was his decision to harvest early and process the same day. Little known at the time, this method – carried out when about a third of the fruit had changed their colour, and processing with modern-day cold-press technology so that the

end result contained significant antioxidants – created particularly healthy olive oil of the finest quality.

Storage is equally important. Here at Chiavalon, the olive oil is stored in stainless-steel containers with inert gas at a constant temperature of 16 degrees. This way, oxidation does not occur.

Since 2005, Chiavalon have been showered with international awards – most notably their Ex Albis being named among Flos Olei's Top 15 Olive Oils in the World, and included in the Top 25 Organic Olive-Oil Producers in the World. The Istrian peninsula scored the title of best olive oil producing region in the world four years in a row.

Current products include Organic of intense green, ideally paired with shellfish, tuna and all types of pasta, Romano for fish and mixed vegetable salads, and Mlado, produced during the first three days of early harvest at the start of October, and only in a limited quantity of 2,500 bottles. As Sandi's grandfather would

have done, the new oil is first served with warm, homemade bread – and thereafter, to accompany fish or pasta. A bottle of the Ex Albis is a versatile buy, it's fresh, nutty flavour makes it easy to splash over salads and the Atilio pairs perfectly with red meat.

Chiavalon's oils can be sampled and bought in situ, as part of a personal tour around the estate in the centre of Vodnjan, north of Pula. You can learn about the production process and how to spot authentic extra virgin olive oil as part of several tours and workshops - or customise your own private, tailor-made tour at the family estate.

Contact Chiavalon on +385 98 860 566 or email [info@chiavalon.hr](mailto:info@chiavalon.hr). The estate is open Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat 10am-2pm, closed Sun and holidays. Address: ulica Vladimira Nazora 16C, 52215 Vodnjan. [www.chiavalon.hr](http://www.chiavalon.hr)

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## TO DO

### Hilltop home

Emmy-winning travel host Ashley Colburn guides us around her adopted home, the hilltop town of Brtonigla.



**I'VE SPENT YEARS** travelling around the world but I consider Istria home. This northwestern peninsula offers surprises at every turn. Scenic towns rise up out of the hills, with cobblestone streets playing host to a languorous Mediterranean life, overlooking sun-drenched vineyards and rows of spindly olive trees.

From its crumbling stucco walls to its winding alleyways, Brtonigla's postcard-perfect scenery is what first attracted me to the town. I'm usually woken up by the roosters in the morning, or by the bells from the nearby church. Mornings are spent sipping macchiatos under the shaded canopy of the café, the beating heart of the town. For village gossip and homecooked Istrian dishes, Primizia is my favourite local restaurant.

Brtonigla is best explored by bicycle or by foot. The gleamingly green Skarline Nature Park is just a few kilometers from the town square. A verdant canyon with a stream crisscrossing through, it's a fabulous place to cool off in summer. Bike paths connect the hilltop towns, so the park is easily

accessible to cyclists. This path brings you to yet another natural treasure, set beneath the ground. Mramornica Cave is one of the biggest and most breathtaking caves in Istria. A parade of icicle-shaped stalactites and stalagmites, its naturally cooling chambers are used by locals to store their wine at just the right temperature.

I first discovered Brtonigla after staying at San Rocco, a beautifully restored farmhouse surrounded by an olive plantation. This hotel has helped to put Brtonigla on the map, with its Michelin-recommended kitchen and effortlessly romantic atmosphere. A family-run business, the Fernetichs show what real Istrian hospitality is all about.

Offering 14 rustic yet upscale rooms, replete with old wooden beams and period features, this hotel provides an intimate, boutique experience. If you're looking to get away from it all, San Rocco provides a wellness centre with a pool and lounge overlooking a garden of majestic, winding olive trees. Celebrated for its gastronomy, the slow food tasting menu changes with the seasons and dishes are perfectly paired with local wines. The oil splashed over your salad is pressed from the hotel's own olive groves – you can even buy a bottle to take home.

I have to admit, I'm a regular at Cattunar Vineyard – they produce excellent Malvazija wine and it's within easy walking distance from town. North-west Istria is the only place in the region where you can find grey, white, black and red soil, and producers make wine varieties in all four types. You could spend the whole day touring the

vineyards around Brtonigla alone. I would suggest trying Veralda's award-winning Teran or their sparkling wine, a lovely summery drink, but you can also prowl local farms and try wines made by small-scale family producers.

Brtonigla is perfect for families. Istralandia, Croatia's most exciting waterpark, is based right here. Voted the second-best waterpark in Europe, it's a cavalcade of fun water-based activities, from wave pools to daredevil slides and toddler zones for younger children. Truthfully, the adults enjoy it as much as the kids do.

Make sure you're here in August for Brtonigla's main summer event. St. Roch's Feast honours the town's patron saint, and the village buzzes with life as thousands come to drink, eat and party into the morning. My favourite event is the brilliantly eccentric Balinjerada contest, when locals and their kids build non-motorized carts and fly them down the hill at lightning speeds.



But this isn't the only thing racing through the streets. The next day, locals, tourists and adventure junkies ride Istrian donkeys in the town's celebrated annual donkey race, culminating in the main square where the celebration continues for days. Don't miss this year's St. Roch's Feast, from August 14-16 2019.

#### Go underground at Mramornica cave

Admire the glittering stalactites and stalagmites as you descend beneath the earth.

→ (099 250 2958, agroturizamsterle.hr)

#### Cycle to Nature Park Skarline – and beyond

Get on your bike and stop to cool off at the gorgeously green Skarline and its natural springs.



#### Taste local wine

Local vineyards Cattunar and Veralda are great places to sample some great Istrian wines. The area's other main wine producers Ravalico, Capo and Novacco are also fantastic.

→ Cattunar, Nova Vas 94 (052 720 496, cattunar.net)

→ Veralda, Kršín 3 (052 774 111, veralda.hr)

→ Ravalico, Nova Vas 101 (098 219 045, f-f-ravalico.hr)

→ Capo, Fernetiči 60 (052 774 401, capovina.hr)

→ Novacco, Fernetiči 70 (052 774 321, novacco.hr)

#### Splash about at Istralandia

Dive into Istria's biggest and best waterpark – for kids and grown-ups.

→ (052 866 900, istralandia.hr)



#### Sample local cuisine

The hilltop town of Brtonigla is a foodie hub and boasts a crop of fabulous restaurants – my picks include San Rocco, Food & Wine Primizia, Konoba Astarea, Konoba Silvano, Konoba Morgan and Agroturizam Vinerino.

→ San Rocco, Srednja ulica 2 (052 725 000, san-rocco.hr)

→ Food & Wine Primizia, Bunarska 2 (052 774 704, primizia.hr)

→ Konoba Astarea, Ronko 6 (052 774 384, facebook.com/Konoba-Astarea)

→ Konoba Silvano, Marconi 10 (099 707 2704)

→ Konoba Morgan, Bracanja 1 (052 774 520, konobamorgan.eu)

→ Agroturizam Vinerino, Druškovičeva 8 (052 774 417, vinerino.com)

→ Agroturizam Sterle, Stancija Drušković 20 (099 250 2958, agroturizamsterle.hr)

→ La Quercia, Fiorini 31 (052 774 455, laquercia.hr)

# On your bike

Travelling along Istria's many biking trails is an ideal way to get an up close and personal view of the peninsula.



**TRAILS HERE SHINE** a special light on its villages and character. You'll also get a sense of the area's history, which saw a succession of controlling groups starting with tribal Histrian clans, which submitted to the Romans in the third century BC. There are reminders of the different rulers and their prevailing architecture at every turn of the handlebars. The pedalling is a mixed bag. There are asphalt-only routes, where cyclists are comfortable atop the skinny wheels of their road or touring bikes. The 93.5-kilometre (58-mile) Montanara Trail climb-a-thon from Umag, which loops northern Istria, is a fine example of such a route. For the most part, plan on a mountain-bike demanding combination of asphalt and macadam in varying ratios depending on preference. In

total, 2,600 kilometres (1,615 miles) of trails stretch across Istria in every direction. For a complete list, see [www.istria-bike.com](http://www.istria-bike.com). It makes recommendations for bikers' hotels, hire companies, sights to visit on the way and solid dining venues. If you are a mountain biker or experienced road cyclist who prefers to enjoy their landscapes through wraparound lenses rather than a car's windshield, the first thing you'll notice here are the rolling hills and the seemingly endless possibilities for being on two wheels. If you're not a seasoned rider, you'll love the chance to spin around Rovinj, for instance, at human speed while soaking

**'The first thing you'll notice here are the rolling hills and the seemingly endless possibilities'**

in the culture. You'll see the constant stream of fellow bikers hugging paved roadside shoulders or gliding along macadam byways. And if you are gastronome with a need to grind gears, you'll have the chance to earn that post-ride bowl of pasta smothered in truffles at trail's end.

The most numerous trails are found in the undulating terrain of the interior. One combining both grit and gourmet is the Truffle's Trail, which is about 60 per cent tarmac riding (40 per cent asphalt) and begins and ends in Buzet. Starting at the foot of the Čičarija Mountains, the route covers nearly 35 kilometres (22 miles) and takes three hours to complete.







The elevation gain is 870 metres (2,850 feet). Buzet, known to the Romans as Piquentum, was the seat of Venetian government in Istria; its architecture, including two town gates and a Baroque well, serve as reminders. Equally importantly for today's riders, it is also the City of Truffles. From here you'll head south and begin an almost immediate steep climb, and then skirt below the hilltop village of Vrh. At this point the trail dives and soars until it again starts to head north following the Mirna river. At the two-thirds mark and after a descent, the path makes what has to be considered one of the best-planned ride stop-offs in Istria: the Yugo-era thermal spas of Istarske Toplice. The Bella Vista trail, which begins and ends in Labin, is filled with what its title suggests: magnificent panoramas of Kvarner Bay and a continuous string of photo-ops. This easy-going to moderate trail is three-quarters asphalt so there's less need to worry about loose stones when readying the camera. The route travels 33 kilometres (20 miles) and should take roughly two hours to complete. The loop leaves the Old Town main square of this art-filled city and first heads inland, down the tiny, mini-peninsula in which Labin sits at its most northerly point. The route stays at between 300 and 500 metres (985-1,640 feet) in altitude until it reaches the Skitača mountain hut. About one kilometre away is a

spring called the "Tears of St Lucia", which, according to legend, can help those with bad vision. From here, you'll be bombing it downhill until Ravni beach. Take a swim and enjoy the rest – you'll need it for the steady 14-kilometre (nine-mile) climb along the eastern seaside rim of the trail back to Labin. For culture, the St Euphemia trail, which rolls through Rovinj, is an ideal choice. A medieval town that was an island until 1763, when the channel separating it from the mainland was filled, Rovinj is Istria's main tourist attraction, with scores of galleries, fine restaurants and a posh atmosphere. St Euphemia refers to the grand church atop the hill guarding the city. The ride takes in Rovinj's sights with a majestic view of the town and the Adriatic beyond. The circular route starts just south of Rovinj at the campsite in Polari, a coastal resort. A straightforward 27-kilometre (17-mile) ride with negligible altitude change, it spends the majority of its time on asphalt. The jaunt takes about two hours and passes a good handful of medieval churches while travelling north and inland before heading south and back to the coast. It also comes within a stone's throw of the Limski kanal, best known for its oysters. Up the coast, the Trail of Captain Morgan and Casanova are two rides that straddle the Limski kanal and provide a quirky microscope on Istrian history. As the story goes, pirate

Captain Morgan hid his treasure and himself near the canal while on the run. This moderate biking route, of equal parts path and road, starts just south of Rovinj and makes a 61-kilometre loop around the canal's head, through the town that bears the pirate's name – Mrgani, where his treasure is reportedly buried – before travelling south again through the beautiful cobbled town of Bale. On the north side of the canal, the Casanova trail is a quick, easy 22-kilometre (14-mile) ramble which begins and ends in Vrsar, where the famous lover visited on two occasions in the 18th century for wine and women. The route follows much of the length of the Limski kanal, moving east from the mouth. More than 75 per cent tarmac, it is a roll through the country and relatively flat, so the trip should only take 90 minutes. One of the longest and most challenging trails is the Motovun East ride, completely asphalt and cycle-friendly. At 72 kilometres (45 miles) it should take about four hours, but be warned that this route gains a total of nearly 1,500 metres (5,000 feet) en route. The circular ride starts with a heavy climb to the perfectly preserved Old Town of Motovun which stands over the truffle-filled forest and Mirna river below. This view attests to the town's former status as Istria's communications hub. Past the Butoniga Lake, the road rushes by the medieval settlement of Draguč and down to Istria's administrative centre of Pazin and its castle built in 983. From here it is mostly a descent back to the car park at the bottom of Motovun.

**'You'll have the chance to earn that post-ride bowl of pasta smothered in truffles at trail's end'**



## GIRANDELLA MARO SUITES 5\*

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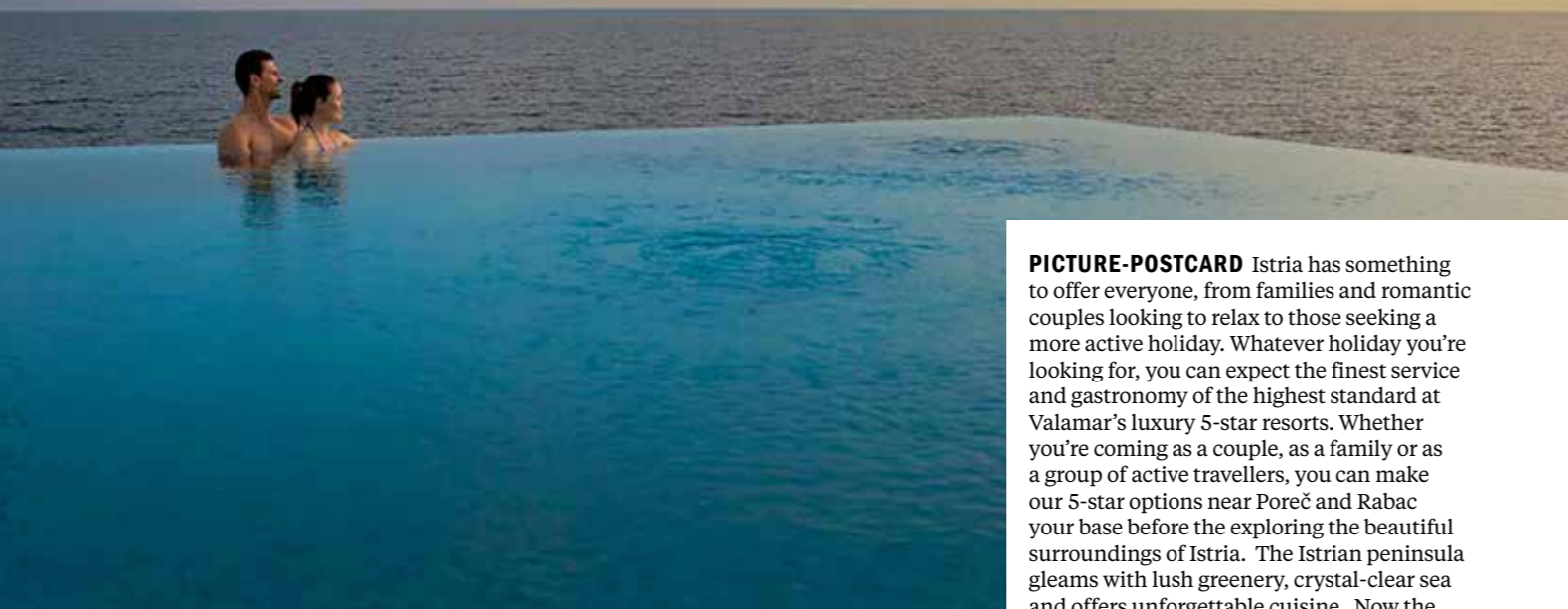
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# Just beachy

Where to stay and relax in Istria with Valamar.



**PICTURE-POSTCARD** Istria has something to offer everyone, from families and romantic couples looking to relax to those seeking a more active holiday. Whatever holiday you're looking for, you can expect the finest service and gastronomy of the highest standard at Valamar's luxury 5-star resorts. Whether you're coming as a couple, as a family or as a group of active travellers, you can make our 5-star options near Poreč and Rabac your base before the exploring the beautiful surroundings of Istria. The Istrian peninsula gleams with lush greenery, crystal-clear sea and offers unforgettable cuisine. Now the choice depends on if you are looking to relax or get active in the sun.

## Valamar Collection Marea Suites

Opened in 2019, the Valamar Collection Marea Suites comprise superior V-Level luxurious lodgings for families, with balconies and sea views, just steps away from a sandy beach in its own cove. Surrounded by dense pine forest ten minutes from the historic centre of Poreč, the Valamar Collection Marea Suites has four pools for all ages – a shallow splash pool for babies, a children's pool lined with water slides, an infinity sea-water pool alongside the Beat Beach Club, and a huge activity pool with an equally spacious area for sunbathing.

Parents can take advantage of the professional child-care and babysitting services on site, entertainment programmes and playrooms cater to children up to 12, while a Teen Hangout zone, sports and gaming tournaments, and an open-air cinema appeal to 13s and over. If that's not enough, tennis courts, a spa centre and gym are available. It's total paradise.

→ [valamar.com/en/hotels-porec/valamar-marea-suites](http://valamar.com/en/hotels-porec/valamar-marea-suites)



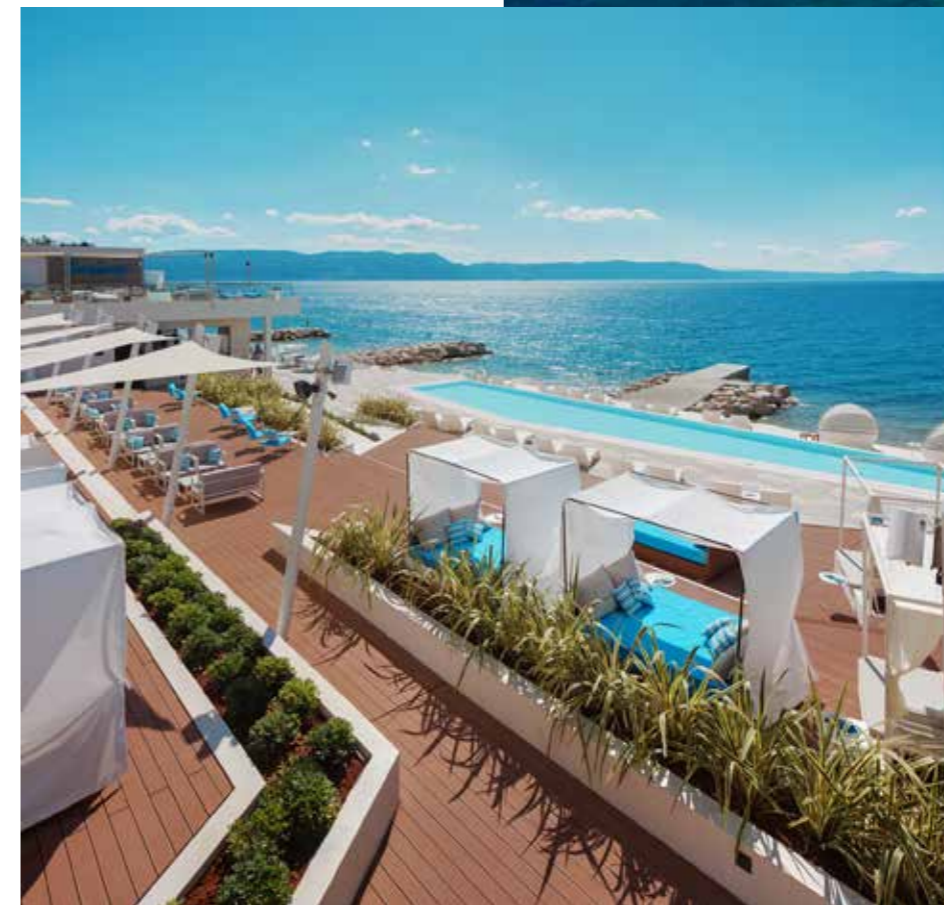
## Valamar Collection Isabella Island Resort

If you are looking to stay on an island, but still have easy access to Poreč, consider Valamar Collection Isabella Island Resort. A free boat ride takes you to the island of Sveti Nikola, a crowd-free getaway completely surrounded by lush Mediterranean vegetation, pine trees, landscaped gardens and the pristine blue of the Adriatic. Here, five choices of lodgings – hotel, villas, V-Level villas, suites and apartments – sit alongside a sports centre, spa complex, three pools containing seawater and freshwater options (two of which are heated) and seven individually themed beaches. Adults can choose the secluded Val Riviera Relax Beach, families have four beach options dotted around the island, while exclusive V-Level guests have their own private beaches and private pools too.

For active travellers, sports activities are around every corner and you can start the day with yoga or aerobics, hire a motorboat, go parasailing, rent a kayak, or learn how to dive, surf, sail or SUP. A communal game of beach volleyball or street basketball can bookend another perfect day.

Those looking to maintain their fitness routine can sign up for one of the Stay Fit programmes, featuring at least five activities each day with aqua aerobics, Nordic walking, Zumba and Pilates to choose from. Holidays have never been so healthy.

→ [valamar.com/en/hotels-porec/valamar-isabella-island-resort](http://valamar.com/en/hotels-porec/valamar-isabella-island-resort)



## Valamar Collection Girandella Resort

Full of gorgeous shingle beaches, in Rabac, the Valamar Collection Girandella Resort has been created with three types of visitors in mind; families, adults-only and exclusive V-Level customers.

For romantic couples, the guestrooms have spacious showers and some rooms are fitted with a hydro-massage tub made for two. From the Beach Club and infinity pool to the child-free Rebelle Restaurant, it's all geared towards spending quality time with your partner.

Families can find fun activities for kids of all ages, from the Baby Club to children's club Maro, catering for two age groups, its tried and tested programmes are popular with teenagers.

Elsewhere, you'll find Finnish, steam and aroma saunas in the spa centre, plus a solarium and whirlpool, and trails a-plenty as part of the Bike Park Rabac. V-Level customers can enjoy a private pool or even a private beach and more adventurous couples can opt to rent a speedboat, go scuba diving or try their hand at windsurfing at the V Sport Point. Experience the brazenly beautiful Adriatic coast in Rabac and have a holiday like no other with Valamar.

→ [www.valamar.com/en/hotels-rabac/valamar-girandella-resort](http://www.valamar.com/en/hotels-rabac/valamar-girandella-resort)

# Tito's Shangri-La

Known for its dinosaurs and dictators, Brijuni is a surreal collection of islands famous for their association with Tito.

**THE WORLD OF THE UPMARKET** hideaway with its swanky harbour, spa facilities, bespoke entertainment and private beach is far from being a modern invention. If the Roman villas scattered along the Istrian coast are anything to go by, the idea of the purpose-built holiday paradise has been around for at least 2000 years.

However Istria's most famous example of a sea-lapped Shangri-La is at Brijuni, the group of islands purchased by Austrian steel magnate Paul Kupelwieser in 1893. Nowadays a national park, the archipelago has at various times in its history served as high-society holiday resort, U-boat base and meeting point for the international political cream. Combining the aura of the European belle-epoque with the slightly menacing mystique of a Bond villain's lair, Brijuni is imbued with a symbolism that few other places can match.

Paul Kupelwieser's initial aim was to turn the islands into a family estate comprising

vineyards, holiday villas and a small hotel. Only gradually did it dawn on him that Brijuni would make the perfect luxury resort. The pre-World War I tourist industry was largely focused on the health benefits of mild climate, sea air and fragrant local flora: a combination that made Brijuni an ideal destination. However it took a decade and a half of hard work to bring the islands up to scratch. Scrub was cleared and replaced by landscaped forest park. Malaria was eliminated by inviting world-famous bacteriologist Robert Koch to come up with a systematic plan to cure the local inhabitants and clear the swamps. Hotels were built, and safari-park pioneer Karl Hagenbeck was called upon to create an open-plan zoo filled with deer, monkeys and exotic birds. It was not the first time that someone had tried to create their own corner of paradise on the shores of the Adriatic sea, but Brijuni was on a scale far bigger than anything attempted before.

The transformation of Brijuni from natural wilderness to leisure-industry wonder was something that Austrian newspapers never tired of talking about; in a way Kupelwieser's creation of an Adriatic Eden was a metaphor for Austria's imperial destiny, turning Europe's semi-civilized southeastern fringes into a zone of refinement and culture. The fact that Kupelwieser employed hundreds of local people to do it allowed the Viennese press to treat him as a symbol of Austrian noblesse oblige, a philanthropist and humanist rather than an oligarchic dreamer eager to control a private world.

Getting to Brijuni usually involved a 13-hour train journey from Vienna to Pula, main port of the Austrian navy, before catching a small steamer to the islands themselves. Filled with huge grey battleships at anchor, Pula harbour made a huge impression on those who passed through. Indeed Pula and Brijuni were like two

halves of one big imperial show – the former symbolized Austria's maritime might, while the latter demonstrated the kind of paradise available to anyone able to enter its economic and cultural elite.

Popular with aristocrats right from the start, Brijuni's most esteemed regular was Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne whose assassination at Sarajevo provoked the slide to war in 1914. The Archduke wanted to buy a part of Veli Brijun for himself, but Kupelwieser constantly stalled, aware that the notoriously bossy heir would end up taking over the whole island given half the chance.

Brijuni attracted high aristocracy and company directors, but also a large number

of actors, artists and writers – the latter in particular were highly valued by Kupelwieser because of the word-of-mouth publicity they tended to generate. However Brijuni's island location and intimate scale ensured a rather select public, eager to socialize with their social or intellectual peers.

During World War I Brijuni served as the base of Austria's submarine fleet, with elite marine officers replacing elite tourists in the resort's hotels and restaurants. However the Austrian Empire was to collapse utterly in the autumn of 1918, and the Brijuni islands were awarded to Italy by post-war peace-makers. Brijuni had to adapt to a new kind of tourist industry in which the Austrian elite had disappeared,



## Brijuni

replaced by a more cosmopolitan crowd who favoured dance orchestras and cocktails rather than military bands and five-o'clock teas. Kupelwieser's son Karl invested in golf course and polo stables in an attempt to lure the beau monde. It was an expensive way to rebrand the island, and the international polo crowd was in any case a relatively small group who rarely stayed more than a few days at a time. The British Mediterranean fleet brought their polo teams here every year, but the visitors stayed and ate on their ships, bringing little money into the Kupelwieser coffers.

The post-1929 depression led to falling tourism and rising debts; unable to service the latter, Karl Kupelwieser crept off to an isolated bay and shot himself in 1930. The remaining family members tried to keep the business afloat, eventually selling out to the Italian government in 1936. A short period of optimism, characterized by rising tourist numbers and fresh investment, was followed by the calamitous year of 1938, when international tensions and fear of war meant that most would-be travellers opted to stay at home. The resort's Christmas Dinner of December 1938 attracted a grand total of two paying guests.

The residual glamour of Brijuni exerted a strong pull on Yugoslavia's post-war leader Josip Broz Tito, who chose the islands as one of his many private residences in 1947. It was an odd but revealing choice for the communist leader of a supposedly egalitarian society. Staying on Brijuni set Tito apart from his comrades in the party and put them at a profound disadvantage, forcing them into the position of behaving like grateful holiday guests on someone else's land.

Government officials filled former hotels; and new accommodation was built to accommodate more. Tito lived in the former villa of the Duke of Spoleto before the construction of his official residence, the White Villa, in 1953. However the White Villa was not secluded enough for Tito, who had an additional summer house built on the islet of Vanga. Here he could enjoy a private pebble beach, a fishermen's saloon decked out in nets and lanterns, a 'Macedonian room' full of Balkan woodcarving, and a photography lab where he could indulge his



hobby. Vanga's orchards produced mandarins, which Tito famously distributed to children throughout the country, and also lemons, bananas and kiwi fruit.

Tito spent less time on Vanga after 1977 - allegedly because he didn't like the way it had been refurbished, but also because he couldn't stand being on holiday with spouse Jovanka. The Yugoslav supremo spent the summers of 1977, 1978 and 1979 in a marquee set up opposite a former Byzantine fort where archeological excavations were taking place. It was here in 1977 that he hosted fellow canvas enthusiast Muammar Ghaddafi, one of the numerous foreign leaders to beat a path to the island.

The role of Brijuni in international diplomacy was an essential part of its mystique. Soviet strongman Nikita Khrushchev hurried here in 1954 in a (largely unsuccessful) attempt to heal Yugoslavia's rift with Moscow; Indian leader Nehru and Egyptian President Nasser came to sign the Brijuni Declaration, foundation stone of the Non-Aligned Movement, in the same year. Visits by Che Guevara and Yasser Arafat helped to burnish Tito's revolutionary credentials, while the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1972 confirmed Tito's position on the A-list of international diplomacy.

Listing all of the international political

figures who visited Tito on Brijuni would add up to an A-to-Z of pretty much everyone who held any importance in the years 1954-1980. Providing Brijuni an added veneer of glamour was Tito's habit of inviting non-political celebrities to the islands - not just Yugoslav artists, writers and opera divas but also many of the international film stars who happened to be making films in Yugoslavia or who had been invited to the film festival in nearby Pula. Sophia Loren, Richard Burton, Liz Taylor and Gina Lollobrigida all stayed in the villas of Veli Brijuni, and were frequently invited to Tito's own summerhouse on Vanga. According to anecdote, Sophia Loren made herself busy in Tito's kitchen supervising the cooking of pasta; Richard Burton studied the Tito at close quarters in preparation for playing him in the epic war film *Sutjeska* in 1973.

Regardless of whether it really happened, the idea of international glam-puss Loren cooking up cannelloni for Yugoslavia's dandy dictator makes for an arresting mental image. Brijuni was the Adriatic's longest-running soap-opera of prestige and power, with film stars, world leaders and the communist hierarchy mingling together in the popular imagination, as if they had all been somehow invited to the same cocktail party. There was never any other island like it, and it is unlikely there will ever be again.



## Istria for kids

Edited by Marc Rowlands

**WITH ITS INCREDIBLE** food and wine, connoisseur-level olive oil and ancient architecture, Istria can seem like a very adult destination. And indeed it is. But Istria is also a fun and family-orientated region with some of the best theme parks in Europe. Chuck in the pristine beaches and sunny skies and there really is no better place to take the kids on holiday.

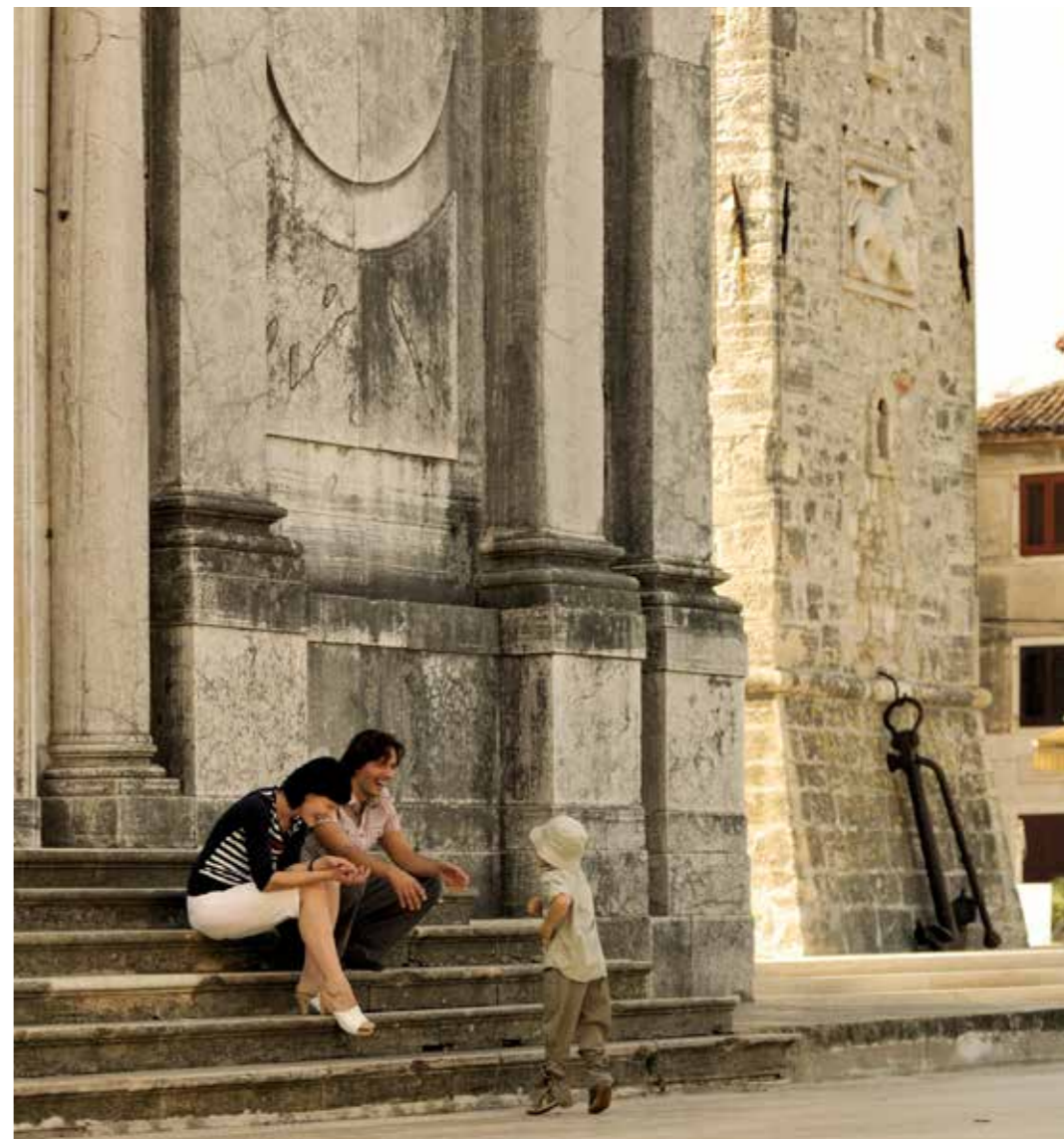
### Bicycle or hike the trail of the rail

The Parenzana Trail follows the route of the railway that once connected Poreč and Trieste but in 2002 the disused line was turned into a path for bicycling and walking. Its 61 kilometres (38 miles) provide an interesting and fun route through beautiful countryside, passing over bridges and through old stone tunnels. It is almost completely tarmacked for the comfort of those using it, but that doesn't detract from the wonderful sense of being at one with nature as you pass forested areas, rolling hills and picturesque agricultural land. Today known as 'The Route of Health and Friendship', the trail Savudrija, home to the oldest lighthouse in the Adriatic, Buje, Grožnjan, Opatalj, Livade, Motovun, Forest and Mirna river and also Vižinada, whose town square features a well built in 1722. Several churches, most notably the beautifully frescoed St Barnabas, and the nearby Oklen lavender fields, also await.

### Fishy fun

The most spectacular sights beneath Istria's immaculate seas often lie too deep for the youngest visitors to catch with simple snorkelling gear or salt-tired eyes. But that doesn't mean they have to miss out. There are four great aquariums along the south and west coasts of Istria.

Pula Aquarium, the largest, is set inside the impressive Verudela Fort, a short walk from arguably the city's best beaching area - a great place to hide from the sun when it's at its fiercest. There are 30



## Istria for kids

exhibits including a touch pool: an open-topped basin where visitors can pet the scary shark-shaped dogfish. There's also turtles, crabs and sundry sea creatures. A tunnel through the back of the fortress leads to a freshwater pond containing fish native to Croatia's lakes and rivers. Other exhibits include fishermen's nets and traps, and underwater photography. The Pula Aquarium is also the home of the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre.

One of Istria's oldest aquariums is found along the west coast in Rovinj and based at the Ruder Bošković Institute's Centre for Maritime Research. A decent collection of residents include a fearsome octopus, scorpion fish and lobsters.

Further north, the Poreč Aquarium is in the heart of the old area of the city, so easily fits in with other sightseeing expeditions. A modern venue, it contains 25 tanks displaying fish, flora and fauna from the Adriatic. Many artefacts have been donated by local fishermen.

The Umag Aquarium in the north-western tip of Istria, is owned by the same company that runs the aquarium in Poreč and is quite similar. Opened in 2005 and set in a shopping centre near the Old Town, it contains 25 tanks, including one open-topped pool, all featuring species native to the Adriatic.



### Istralandia

Istralandia is Croatia's most exciting waterpark, located just outside of the beautiful hilltop town Brtonigla. Surrounded by lush forest, rolling fields and greenery for as far as the eye can see, it is an

oasis of fun packed waterslides, wave pools and toddler areas. Istralandia has been voted the second best waterpark in Europe, complemented by its stunning setting and proximity to the sea. → Brtonigla (052 866 900, [istralandia.hr](http://istralandia.hr))

### Dino Park

Following in the footsteps of Jurassic Park and the Walking With Dinosaurs series, Dino Park near Funtana brings dinosaurs to life, aiming to educate and thrill young visitors. As well as life-size

dinosaur models, many of which move mechanically, there's all manner of fun things to do at the site including a children's train, a dinosaur-themed children's cinema, a pirate ship, carousel, trampolines, a playground and a prehistoric workshop. A nature trail also gives visitors a peek into our prehistoric past and provides a thought-provoking distraction to the high-octane rides, circus performances and pony riding on offer.

→ Istarska ulica, Funtana (052 4456 327, [dinopark.hr](http://dinopark.hr))

### Aqua Colours

Croatia's largest water park, the brilliant Aqua Colours in Poreč has 13 waterslides, two large pools, a half kilometre feature called Lazy River and an exhilarating wave machine that runs every half hour throughout the day. The complex is so big and offers so many things to do, it's easy to spend the bulk of the day here, as many local families do. Outside of the splendid water-based activities here there's also a children's playground, beach volleyball and sports courts.

→ Molindrio 10, Poreč (052 219 671, [aquacolors.eu](http://aquacolors.eu))



Aquacolors Aquapark, Poreč



Istralandia



# MY ISTRIA

## Your kind of holiday



**WHAT BEGAN** with one villa, three friends and a property owner in need of advice has developed into a business of 700-plus luxury lodgings and more than 40,000 guests a year.

But some things never change. My Istria, the company created from a simple idea, retains its personal touch and local know-how. And Istria, home of these three friends, remains as rustic and relaxing as ever. The vineyards, the hilltop villages barely altered since the Venetians, the outstanding gastronomy and the easy distances between villa, coast and destination restaurants, Croatia's best-kept secret is as authentic and welcoming as when the three founders of My Istria sat around a dining table in 2008.

What's different is the 50,000-plus annual holidaymakers looking for the perfect place to stay.

And in choosing a private villa over a hotel, they have opted for independence, privacy, flexibility and diversity. Couples seek intimacy. A family might need full use of the pool and a plenty of space for the dog to run around. Others revel in cooking, spending the morning picking up seasonal produce at the local market, fish

fresh that day and a top-notch bottle of wine from the terroir on which it was grown, and taking the time to throw it all together while friends chat on the terrace. Open another bottle, you're on holiday. And, at the end of the meal, there's no need to worry about the bill.

Of course, not all of the fun on offer revolves the villa, but those seeking the thrills of an active break might take advantage of communal jacuzzi to soak away tired muscles after a hard day's cycling, hiking or windsurfing. Now with more than 700

hand-picked properties, all vetted, verified and accurately presented on their website, My Istria has the villa to meet your holiday needs. And if you're not sure, ask. After more than ten years of working directly with villa owners, the team at My Istria can deal with

most requests and questions. Remember – My Istria is not a booking website but a long-term venture set up by a small group of friends whose roots lie here, whose business depends upon the satisfaction of their guests.

My Istria also offers a low-price guarantee, a property manager available 24/7 before and during your stay, and all-risk coverage with Allianz, the world's largest insurance company, for any property damage or holiday cancellation.

That's the details taken care of. Now what about your holiday?

### Family breaks

If you're coming to Istria as a family, one of the first things you need to consider is a pool. The kids can splash about safely while the adults can stretch out on the sun lounger and dive in whenever the lilo's free. Proximity to the sea is also handy – you'll want to have the option of beach days as well.

An excellent and affordable choice would be the Villa Kokola near Umag, in Istria's north-west. Sleeping 5+1 guests in two bedrooms, it's intimate without

being crowded. By the pool is a barbecue (with charcoal supplied) and outside dining area for alfresco evenings, there's private parking for two cars, three sun loungers and a high chair for the little one. If it gets chilly later on, you can gather round the fireplace with a board game. The villa comes with that all essential WiFi, plus a dishwasher, washing machine and coffee maker. The nearest beach is 5km away, the award-winning Aquapark Istralandia is under 10km and if you're here in July, you can see top tennis stars in action at the Croatian Open in Umag. Pets are also welcome.

If there are more of you or you're two families looking to combine a stay, the Villa Roveria might be just the place. Here you have two houses in one, offered as a single property for your use exclusively. Sleeping ten altogether, one house with three bedrooms, the other with two, the Villa Roveria has a large indoor area to give everyone plenty of space, a private pool of 50 square metres, a heated pool as an added extra, ten sun loungers, a garden and even a sauna. Broadband WiFi should keep the

kids happy, while the family can gather and watch a film together thanks to the DVD player. A dishwasher, washing machine and child's high chair will also come in handy. All is enclosed to allow complete privacy.

The location, 25km from Pula Airport, couldn't be more convenient, the pebble beaches near Rovinj and Fažana no more than a 20-minute drive. Once you're in Fažana, you can hop over to the Brijuni Islands by taxi boat to see real dinosaur footprints and exotic creatures from India and Africa. Pula, with its authentic Roman colosseum, has plenty to offer for a day out, and you may even catch a major music act playing the amphitheatre or the prestigious annual film festival.

### Villa Kokola

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-umag/villa-kokola>

### Villa Roveria

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-central-istria/villa-roveria>

### Romantic getaways

Privacy and intimacy are essentials

for any romantic getaway – having a world-famous observatory on your doorstep for star-gazing à deux is the kind of fabulous extra that only rural Istria can provide. A few minutes' drive from Višnjani, site of a public observatory where more than 100 minor planets have been discovered, the Villa Moro is a cosy idyll complemented by a pretty, carefully tended garden. There, two sun loungers await, or there's natural shade under the trees.

Here, in this restored old stone hamlet, peace and tranquillity are assured, meadows and woods stretching out from this hilltop location. At night, the two of you can curl up around the fireplace. The bedroom has a balcony, and you can choose between a bathtub or shower, or even outdoor shower. You can also keep in touch with the outside world thanks to broadband WiFi.

You'll find a handful of restaurants in Višnjani or, under 20km away, Poreč has more eateries and beaches than you can shake a stick at.

Closer to the coast and with its own private pool, the Villa Vista



Kokola



Roveria

## Advertorial

sul Quarnero has that winning romantic element, a sea view. In fact, a sea view from the pool. You can even enjoy a sweeping vista of the Bay of Kvarner from the exercise treadmill available for your use.

Here, 40km from Rijeka Airport, you're literally sitting above the gastronomic hub of Volosko, a little fishing village now dotted with destination restaurants. A little further down the coast is Opatija, the grand dame of Croatian resorts, where you can dine where Habsburg high society did some 125 years ago.

If you prefer to eat at home, there's a barbecue, charcoal and an outdoor dining area set before that jaw-dropping sea view.

There's more sea-view and pool-side privacy at the Villa Gabi, less than 10km from the gastronomic destination of Rovinj. And here the pool has its own jacuzzi corner, gazing out over a verdant landscape before a horizon of pure blue sky and sea.

Inside, the villa has underfloor heating and a fireplace, while the outdoor dining area comes with a barbecue and charcoal. You also have a choice of bedrooms, either downstairs as part of the open-plan living area, or upstairs with a more striking view.

Pula Airport is under 30km away while the nearest main town, Bale, is just 3km away and can provide the basics of a supermarket, a



Gabi

bakery and an ATM.

### Villa Moro

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-porec/villa-moro>

### Villa Vista sul Quarnero

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-opatija/villa-vista-sul-quarnero>

### Villa Gabi

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-rovinj/villa-gabi>

### Active holidays

For an active break, Istria's compact size means that you

can go windsurfing, diving or sailing one day and horseback riding, trekking or mountain-biking the next.

You'll also need a well-equipped villa to come home to, somewhere with a jacuzzi or sauna, or both, to relax tired muscles.

A 20-minute drive from Pula Airport and a ten-minute walk from the beaches and surfing spot of Barbariga, the Villa Valencan has both an outdoor jacuzzi and a sauna, as well as a private pool which can be heated on request. Accommodating 6+2 guests with three bedrooms and three

bathrooms, the villa also has private parking but, given the proximity of Barbariga and its many hidden bathing destinations, you can even leave the car at home and still enjoy a day out.

If you're feeling a little more adventurous, then you'll find a German-run scuba diving centre at Polari, this side of Rovinj, under 10km away. Experienced divers can explore a number of shipwrecks, included the unique Baron Gautsch passenger steamer, while beginners have a choice of five levels of courses.

Also on Istria's south-west coast but in Pula, walking distance from a marina and diving centre, a quick bus hop from the historic centre and a short drive to the major sports attractions of Medulin, the Villa Botanica allows you to relax in a communal, outdoor, stand-alone jacuzzi, a solar-heated private pool and Finnish sauna. If you're still feeling competitive after your day's exertions, you can man the games console or challenge your friends to a game of pool.

An outdoor dining area with a barbecue allows you to cook alfresco or the many restaurants around Veruda marina are a short stroll away. Here, boat rental is also possible or you can charter your own yacht. The nearest diving centre – there are several – offers daytime and night-time exploration of caves, reefs and wrecks. There's also a special course on underwater photography.

If you're looking to spend most of your time in the sea, then



### Why myistria.com?

- Over 720 beautiful villas
- 11 years of experience
- Personally verified villas
- Simple booking process
- Live booking assistant



Greyhouse





Folorantica

the Villa Greyhouse in Ližnjan should cater to all your needs. Here, tucked in from the south-eastern promontory of the Istrian peninsula, you're not only a five-minute drive from the surfing and windsurfing spots on the Ližnjan coast, but almost equidistant from Medulin and Premantura, the main windsurf centres of the region. Halfway between Ližnjan and Medulin, Samy's Ranch offers horse riding, quad biking and paintball. Back at the villa, relax on the lounge around your own private pool and soak up some rays on the expansive sun terrace.

#### Villa Valencan

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-rovinj/villa-valencan>

#### Villa Botanica

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-pula/villa-botanica>

#### Villa Greyhouse

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-pula/villa-greyhouse>

#### Unique stays

If the stay itself is the focus of your getaway, then My Istria has a whole range of unique villas.

Nature lovers can kick back in the surrounds of an ornithological reserve at the Villa Birds House, an eco lodging of three bedrooms sleeping 5+3, three bathrooms, private pool, luxuriant garden and parking for eight cars. And, of course, all that birdsong. Indoor heating is provided with a wood-fired oven.

You'll probably find yourselves spending plenty of time in The Nest, a wooden pavilion overlooking the pool equipped with a large communal bed. In fact, with the sand-volleyball court, basketball, badminton, table tennis, mini football and dartboard, you need never leave the 5,000 square-metre site, but ten bicycles are left for guests' disposal to ride down to the nearest sandy beach 1.5km away. The restaurants, shops and historic attractions of Bale and Rovinj are also less than 10km from the property. If you prefer to cook at home, there's a barbecue, charcoal and spacious dining areas indoor and out.

Up to ten people can stay at the Villa Folorantica, half the population of the surrounding village of Foli. Here the local medieval nobility built this grandiose property in the 1600s. Fortunately its current owner is a world-renowned interior designer, commissioned by the likes of Sting and Carlos Santana. Private pool, underfloor heating, fireplace, rustic terrace, indoor and outdoor dining areas for ten, with air-conditioning throughout, all is a seamless and stylish marriage of medieval and contemporary. Thick stone walls ensure privacy – as the counts of yesteryear would have appreciated.

Restaurants and shops can be found in the sizeable village of Svetvinčenat 3km away, dominated by Grimandi Castle. The nearest beach is in Rovinj 16km away, the nearest airport is Pula, 22km away.

Leaving villas aside, the most unusual property in the whole My Istria portfolio is the Lighthouse Marlera. Built off the south-eastern tip of Istria in 1875, renovated and converted into a comfortable, three-bedroom lodging in 2012, the Lighthouse Marlera is remote yet well-connected, with Pula Airport only 10km away. A few steps away, however, is the sea, the crashing waves a constant reassuring backdrop. A giant, shaded outdoor bed allows you to lie back and listen to the seagulls. Inside, you can warm up around the fireplace on chilly evenings.

There's scuba diving, cycle hire and surfing practically on your doorstep while a free boat service can take you across to the island of Levana, with its sandy beach and waterside bars.

#### Villa Birds House

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-rovinj/villa-birds-house>

#### Villa Folorantica

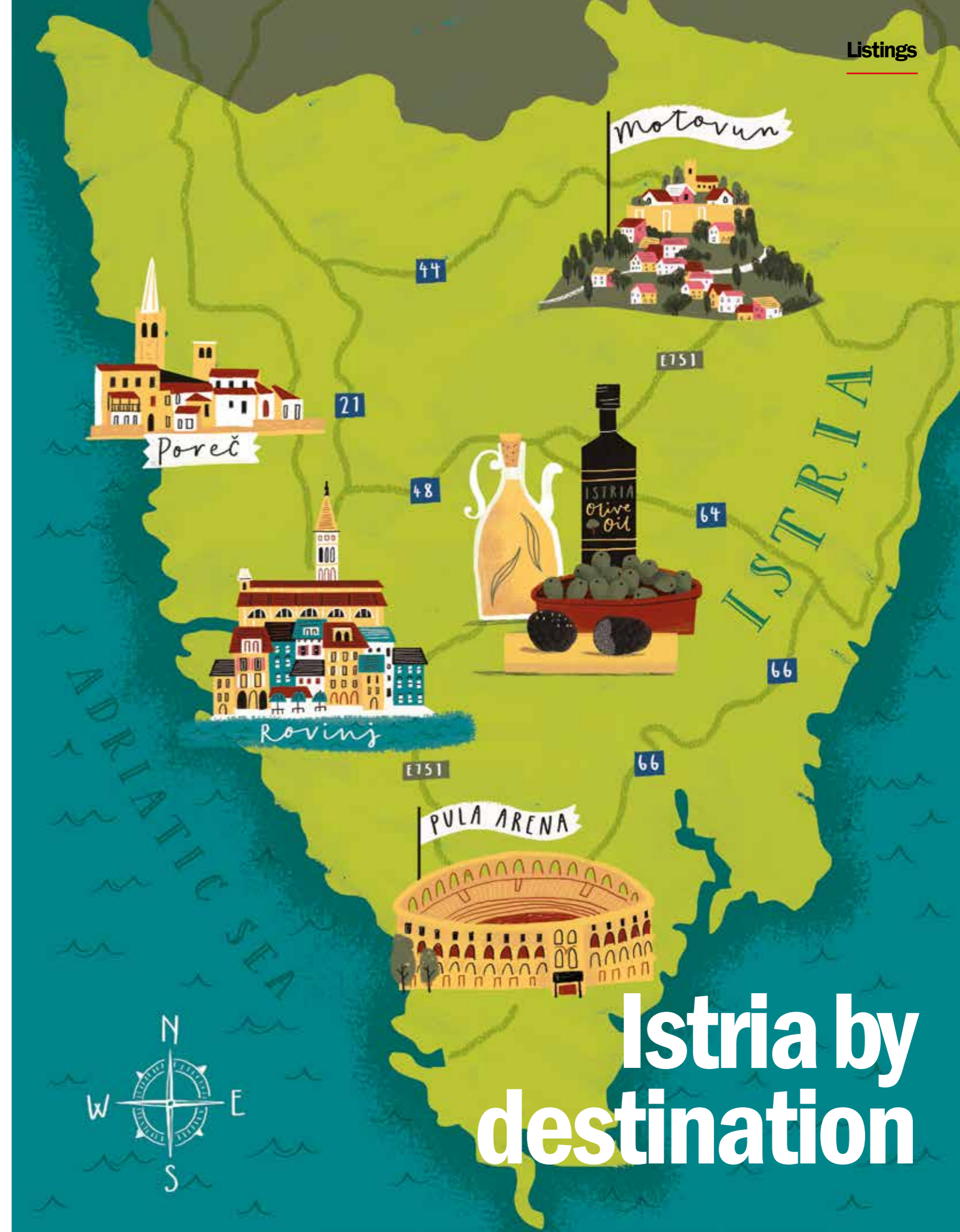
→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-central-istria/villa-folorantica>

#### Lighthouse Marlera

→ <https://www.myistria.com/en/villas/in-pula/lighthouse-marlera>  
myistria.com



Lighthouse Marlera



# Istria by destination



# Pula Top 30

Istria's historic main city of Pula is symbolised by its Roman amphitheatre, scene of a surprisingly wide range of outdoor events every summer.



Pula Colosseum

## 4 Hit the water at Medulin

The main destination in Istria for watersports, Medulin spreads out around a twisting promontory a short drive (or bus ride) south-west of Pula. Dotted with campsites and resort hotels, Medulin offers all kinds of activities on and, to a lesser extent, off the water. You can charter a boat or learn how to sail, dive with varying degrees of difficulty, windsurf, surf, waterski, jetski or just jump on an inflatable banana boat.

**ISTRIA'S HISTORIC** main city of Pula is symbolised by its Roman amphitheatre, scene of a surprisingly wide range of outdoor events every summer. Roman remains also form Pula's city centre, dominated by a hilltop Venetian fortress. With docks rather than beaches nearby, many head south for out-of-town seaside fun in Verudela and Medulin.

## 1 Explore Croatia's Colosseum

It doesn't require much imagination to conjure up the gladiatorial battles that would have taken place in Pula's Amphitheatre 2,000 years ago. In fact, you can even stand in the tunnels and corridors where warriors and lions were kept before entertaining crowds of up to 25,000. Built over the course of a century, the Amphitheatre was given its final touches in AD81 by the Emperor Titus, also responsible for the Colosseum in Rome. Today Pula's is more intact, boasting a near complete ring of walls. It is also in regular use, staging the Film Festival, the opening night of electronic music bash Outlook and big-name concerts.

## 2 Enter Pula in triumph

Having helped win the Battle of Actium in 31BC, the high-ranking Sergii



Arch of the Sergii



family built a triumphal arch to themselves in Pula. The Arch of the Sergii remains the main gateway into what is now Pula's historic centre, virtually intact after more than 2,000 years. Today's pedestrians walk below its portal to access ulica Sergijeveca, somewhat incongruously passing a branch of Spanish clothing chain Mango. Closer inspection of the historic landmark reveals details relating to the events of 31BC, the names of the Sergii clan inscribed on the columns, and a chariot on the frieze.

## 3 Go wild at Outlook

The Croatian offshoot of Leeds festival SubDub, September's Outlook is a four-day celebration of soundsystem culture that takes place at two stand-out locations around Pula. After the opening night at the Amphitheatre, the action moves to the main site at the abandoned fort of Punta Christo. Tunnels, moats and beaches all come into play as leading exponents of dubstep, ragga, garage and reggae make best use of the isolated location. Three-hour boat parties set off at regular intervals.

→ [outlookfestival.com](http://outlookfestival.com)



Outlook Festival



Restaurant Milan

## 5 Sample classic Istrian dishes in 21st-century surroundings

Recently opened Epulon Food & Wine sits by Pula's historic centre but this contemporary eatery is anything but staid. Smooth light wood and bare brick typify this open-plan, high-ceilinged establishment, offset by industrial-style lighting. Istrian tapas may be one way to describe the menu, although you may also find regional favourites such as fuži pasta with truffles, seafood spaghetti and the like. Portions are generous, particularly where burgers are concerned. Of the many Istrian wines, Tomaz from Motovun is the most prominent, rosé, malvazija and teran. Occasional live music augments your pleasant dining experience. → Epulonova 4 (098 949 9023, facebook.com/epulonfoodwine)

## 6 Admire photography at Galerija Makina

Calling itself 'an exhibition space for contemporary photography', the evening-only Galerija Makina near the Pula waterfront offers a regularly changing calendar of challenging art. Run by Hassan Abdelghani, a photographer himself, the gallery staged shows

with New York, a women's prison and motherhood as their themes. Displays are not limited to photographic paper – video works are also included, such as Nothing New Under The Sun by award-winning Austrian Michael Goldgruber in 2017. For the autumn of 2018, Aleks Đakovski's Prolaznik ('Passerby') attracted the cream of Pula's cultural scene to its opening night. → Kapitolinski trg 1 (092 306 7619)

## 7 Sip coffee at Cvajner

With a prime location on the focal Roman forum, Cvajner does justice to its surroundings, filling a former bank with tastefully arranged retro furniture, objets d'art and bohemian finds. Its alternative name is the Kunstcafe. But there's more to Cvajner than wacky design beneath high ceilings. Offering the best coffee in town, Cvajner also has the best selection of beers, from Belgium, Germany and beyond, and cooling fruit cocktails in summer. Throw in a shaded terrace beside the Renaissance City Hall and 2,000-year-old Temple of Augustus, and you several compelling reasons to start, or end, the day here. → Forum 2

## 8 See how locals lived under Tito

Opened in 2018, the Memo Museum is not a collection of notes but rather memories – memories of how locals lived here from the 1950s to the 1980s. Divided into three sections, a street, a city square and a flat, it displays items such as a Fico car, black-and-white televisions, rollerskates and old-school computers. The museum operates from March to November and is open by prior appointment (memomuseumpula@gmail.com) during the winter. → Scalierova 4 (099 827 7280, memo-museum.com)

## 9 Sample local wines at Enoteca Istriana

With 14 choices of malvasia alone, the Enoteca Istriana on the Forum is Pula's go-to venue for regional wines. Sommelier Alena Stuparić has selected the red Teran range – from Marko Geržinić, Gianfranco Kozlović and Franc Arman – with equal care and attention. Both an outlet and a bar, the Enoteca is also the place to taste the famed Istrian prosciutto and olives. Knowledgeable staff are on hand to guide the uninitiated, and

a small array of samples might be the way to start any visit. → Forum 11 (099 323 6541, stefanija.com/hr/enoteka)

## 10 Catch an affordable lunch at Hook and Cook

Istrian street food may be one way to describe Hook and Cook Pula, a convivial newbie right on the city's main drag of Sergijeveca. As well as piscine renditions of quick-lunch favourites – tunasaurus, prawnitilla, tuna steak burger – H&C offers marende, cheap lunches as once found all along the Croatian littoral. For under 40kn, you may be served sardines, tuna salad or brodet, best accompanied by a glass of equally affordable house red. The chips are also excellent – with a portion of fried calamari, your basic but delicious meal is complete. → Sergijeveca 18

## 11 Fine dine at Milan

In a secluded spot by the naval cemetery outside of the city centre, Milan has been the gold standard for quality dining in Pula over many years. Reassuringly pricy but by no means extortionate, this



Pula, market

family-run concern is the kind of place that allows you to indulge in one holiday splash-out. Shellfish is the way to go here, and most dishes involve the own-made olive oil produced within close range of the restaurant. Much like the menu, the wine list is extensive and focused on Istrian produce. Milan is also a three-star hotel, so if you're making a night of it, you can even stay over. → Stoja 4 (052 300 200, milan1967.hr)

## 12 Party at Saccorgiana Bay

Open until 2am and 4am all weekend, the summer-only Zeppelin Beach Bar attracts regular revellers from Pula to a stretch of beach right in Saccorgiana Bay. A music policy of electronica-only usually involves house or dubstep, though the ZBB can also be patronised by day, when you can find a table and welcome shade under the trees. Cocktails are the way to go here, all reasonably affordable so you'll have enough for the taxi back into town. → Zlatne stijene, Uvala Saccorgiana, Verudela (091 654 5117, facebook.com/pg/ZeppelinBeachBar)

## 13 Browse Pula Market

Unlike the main markets in major Croatian cities such as Split and Dubrovnik, Pula's is housed in a historic building with a distinctive architectural style. Constructed out of wrought iron by the Habsburgs, Pula

Market was unveiled before city dignitaries on 18 October 1903. Around the impressive creation of metal and glass, they planted rows of chestnut trees to provide shade, where outdoor stalls were also set up. A complete six-month rebuild in 1997 remained true to the original while improving conditions of storage, refrigeration and ventilation. Traders still fill two floors with meat, fish and sundry local produce, while fresh fruit, vegetables, honeys, wines and oils can be found outside under the ever-present chestnut trees. → Narodni trg 9 (052 218 122, trznica-pula.hr)

## 14 Discover Istria's oldest urban settlement

Past Pula Airport, some 10km north-east of town, Nesactium was the main settlement of the original Histri tribe who would give the region its name. When the Romans laid siege to the town, legend has it that its leader, Epulon, and local families killed themselves rather than be taken prisoner. The Romans duly destroyed what was left of original Nesactium and they created a new town on its site, with a forum, baths and temples. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Nesactium later fell into disrepair.

Today the site is an archaeological park, with remains of the walls built by the Histri tribe and the Romans, of a necropolis and the private villas where the better-off lived 2,000 years ago. → Muntić (ami-pula.hr)

## 15 Follow a Mediterranean diet

Tucked away amid a scattering of holiday homes some 2km from the sea, Farabuto takes some finding – but local taxi drivers are pretty familiar with it by now. The reason is seasonal – here, the menu changes according to the time of year. The team at Farabuto rely on small-batch local producers to supply meat, cheese and vegetables, the fish landed close by and within a relatively short time of it being treated to Belci or Šlajner olive oil. This is the place to try the famed langoustines from Kvarner Bay or, a rarity in these parts, goat – according to season, of course. → Sisplac ulica 15 (052 386 074, farabuto.hr)

## 16 Investigate contemporary art

Located in this adapted space of a former printing works since 2011, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Istria has been staging regular exhibitions while working on setting up a more permanent home within the Venetian fortress. The latest date for relocation is 2020. In similar vein, the museum, known by its



Museum of Contemporary Art of Istria



Boccaporta

Croatian acronym of MSUI, has a somewhat flexible structure, broken down into four main areas. These include Designs & Posters, and Photography, Film & Video, as well as Contemporary Art and Foreign Art. Temporary shows tend to focus on Istrian artists, though there's always room for works from elsewhere in the region, such as the sculptures of Bosnia's Alem Korkut, by way of recent example.

→ Sv Ivana 1 (052 351 541, msu-istre.hr)

## 17 Scale Pula Fortress

When the Venetians wanted a defensive fortress built here, they turned to French military architect Antoine de Ville. Best known for his star-shaped citadel at Montreuil in the Pas-de-Calais, de Ville created a similar construction for Pula. On the lofty site where the ancient tribe of Histri built their fort, the four-pointed fortress now protected Pula's port. Today it provides fine views of the historic centre to one side and the cranes of the nearby shipyard to the other. Sadly, you won't be able to see much of the Roman theatre that once stood below – its stones were put to good use here in the 1630s.

## 18 Enjoy Istrian family hospitality

In the homely surroundings of the Konoba Boccaporta, the motto in the local vernacular is Lipa besida dopire saka vrata – 'A nice word opens the door'. Braised on hot coals, boškarin beef and octopus are deliciously succulent and served with seasonal vegetables, all the kind of quality you might find at dining establishments that can and do charge more. Despite the rustic setting, Boccaporta only dates back to 2014, Toni Draguzet and his family setting the tone with a roaring fireplace and wooden beams. It's all a fair stroll south-east of town but worth the taxi journey.

→ Dolinka 18 (052 506 266, konoba-boccaporta.com)

## 19 Visit a Roman temple

Pula's Roman Forum was once fringed by three temples. While it remains the main square of the city's historic centre, car-free and dotted with café terraces, the Forum now only has one: the Temple of Augustus. Standing next to the City Hall, which ate up part of the Temple of Juno, the Temple of Augustus is remarkably

intact, and considered one of the finest of its kind outside Italy. Supported by elegant Corinthian columns, it beckons to be explored but its later uses, once as a granary, have cleared its interior of much historic detail. What you see is a lapidarium, with a display of Roman sculpture – but the thrill of being inside such as stately landmark built for and during the time of Augustus should satisfy most curious visitors.

## 20 Do your drinking at the docks

Facing the ACI Marina, the recently opened Shipyard Pub is helping bring to life Pula's rather moribund waterfront, staging regular parties, live music and DJs in a stylish, tastefully post-industrial setting. Celebrating the history of the Uljanik shipyard through a chronological photographic exhibition, this popular pub allows students, young professionals and everyday locals to mingle around a long bar counter or outside in summer. It's a huge space – but was

packed to the gills for the World Cup in 2018.

→ Svetog Teodora 1 (097 792 6024, theshipyardpub.hr)

## 21 See how Romans fought, dressed and groomed

Running weekly over the whole summer except during the Pula Film Festival, Spectacvla Antiqua uses Pula's venerable amphitheatre to bring Roman history and civilisation to life, and use it as the backdrop for gladiator fights with real weapons, workshops and displays of ancient clothing and hairstyles, all with narrative explanation. Admission is 80kn, 40kn for children.

## 22 Discover the secrets of the Mediterranean diet

The Ancient Romans processed olive oil in Pula and here, at the House of Istrian Olive Oil near the Arena, you can see how this was done 2,000 years ago. Compared with production today, the only difference is in the technology – the tastes, aromas, chemical compositions and health benefits



Temple of Augustus



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ISTRIA



Shipyard Pub

remain pretty much the same, as a visit here will reveal. Find out from an expert as they show you how to recognise top-quality extra virgin olive oil, an Istrian speciality. Leading brands are available in the museum shop, along with truffles, lavender and Mediterranean plant-based cosmetics.

→ Ulica sv Teodora 1A (052 661 235, oleumhistriae.com)

## 23 Admire art and party in a war-time shelter

Pula's latest and perhaps most unique attraction is so-called Zerostrasse, accessed at Carrarina Nos.1 and 3. A series of tunnels built to protect Pula citizens during air raids – originally for World War I but also for World War II – these passageways are some three to six metres wide and 2.5 metres high. If you're visiting in summer, you might enjoy the cool – the temperature never rises above 20oC. Today a part of the tunnel is used for exhibitions, cultural gatherings and parties.

## 24 Take in art at a sacred site

On Kaštel, the hill dominating Pula, stands the newly renovated Museum and Gallery Sveta Srca, named after the Holy Order who built this church of the same name in 1908. Closed after World War II, the church was eventually taken over by the Archaeological Museum of Istria. Its long renovation eventually provided Pula with one of Croatia's most spectacular and prestigious exhibition spaces for high-profile, temporary shows. The stunning light-filled interior plays host to a rich menu of special-interest history exhibitions, contemporary art installations and other cultural events.

→ Sv Ivana 1 (ami-pula.hr)

## 25 See how cranes light up a whole shipyard

Lighting Giants is the unique work of creative designer Dean Skira, who brings Pula's Uljanik Shipyard to life by illuminating

its cranes. A sophisticated remote control system governs the lighting and scenography, and involves some 16,000 different color combinations.

This spectacular show and lighting display runs every evening from dusk until 10pm, and until midnight in summer, with different combinations for special occasions, holidays and events.

→ youtube.com/watch?v=3dEWGo8UwU&app=desktop

## 26 Walk through history in a hilltop citadel

At the highest point in Pula, the Historical & Maritime Museum of Istria has occupied this adapted Venetian fortification since 1955. Several departments – Pula, medieval and modern Istria and maritime – do a comprehensive job of explaining local and regional development. What makes this institution stand out is its niche collections, of old photographs, coins, insignia and uniforms, among other things. With a

fascinating trove of phonographs, videos and maps, and given the patchwork past of this port, ruled by Habsburgs, Italians and Socialists in less than 50 years, this makes for a very worthwhile visit indeed.

→ Gradinski uspon 6 (052 211 566, ppmi.hr)

## 27 Explore Brijuni

The Brijuni archipelago lies off Istria's west coast, a 15-minute boat journey from Fažana, just north of Pula. Most of the 14 islands are off limits to the public. Luckily, there is so much to see on the other two that you're unlikely to feel hard done by.

Veliki Brijuni is the largest and contains the vast majority of local treasures. Beautiful and vaguely surreal – English country estate meets Jurassic Park – it consists of hectares of well-maintained, green parkland surrounded by the dazzling Adriatic and planted with avenues of prehistoric-looking pines. This is where you'll find a golf course, bird sanctuary, botanical gardens, zoo and safari park, three museums and the main archaeological sites. A map of the islands is posted at its harbour – including details of where to find the dinosaur footprints that dot the shoreline.

Brijuni had to wait until 1893 before it was rescued by Austrian steel magnate Paul Kupelwieser. He excavated Roman treasures, built villas, planted trees, landscaped gardens, built the first 18-hole golf course in continental Europe and even established a zoo. Kupelwieser had, in fact, created his own Xanadu – but he died in 1918.

Brijuni later passed into the hands of Mussolini's Italy. After World War II the Brijuni archipelago, along with the rest of Istria, became part of Tito's Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav leader used Brijuni as his base, conducting diplomacy with the Non-Aligned Movement and inviting the world's rich and famous to his idyllic playground. As you step onto Veliki Brijuni's quayside you are following in the footsteps of Haile Selassie, Queen Elizabeth II, JFK, Sophia Loren – anyone who was anyone in the 1960s. You can see them documented in the 'Josip Broz Tito On Brijuni' exhibition.

A tourist train pootles around the main island for you to see most of the attractions at one go.



Lighting Giants

The archipelago and surrounding waters were proclaimed a national park in 1983, served by a frequent shuttle boat from Pula 6km away.

→ np-brijuni.hr

## 28 See Roman Pula in virtual reality

As a new feature, a walking tour has been devised for you to experience how Pula would have looked like 2,000 years ago. Equipped with VR glasses and a digital map, you stroll through the old city centre, stopping at seven viewpoints to don your VR glasses and immerse yourself into the visual and auditory experience of Roman Pula. Points include the Triumphal Arch of the Sergi, the Forum and the Arena. VR tours come with a specialised guide (360kn), or self-guided (190kn) versions are available. Tours run from May to October, booked through the website or from the Dolija Olive Oil shop at Narodni trg 3.

→ virtualrealitycroatia.com

## 29 Meet sharks, jellyfish and seahorses

Pula Aquarium is the most popular of its kind in Croatia, dedicated to showing the beauty and diversity of the underwater

world and emphasise the need for its protection. Set up in historic Verudela fortress, it is home to some 200 species. Sharks, jellyfish and seahorses are the most sought-after attractions, along with the Marine Turtle Rescue Centre, the aquarium's biggest contribution to marine conservation. The roof of the fort offers magnificent views of

Pula and the sea, and now displays a massive steel dome, the final stage of a reconstruction project to incorporate three new huge tanks.

→ Verudela (052 381 402, aquarium.hr)

## 30 Indulge in a Roman feast

Running over four Saturdays from May 25, the annual

Days of Antiquity - Pula Superiorvm festival transforms Pula into Ancient Rome, with gladiators in the Arena, attractive women wandering around the Forum in Roman dresses and hairstyles, and indulgent gastronomy, all back-dropped by imaginative displays of sound and light.

→ pulasuperiorum.com



Brijuni



## BEST OF THE REST

### BOCA Bar

Upscale snacks and drinks are the main attraction here, inventive bruschettas, fine wines and gin-based cocktails with high-end base spirits. Halfway between the Venetian citadel and the marina, you're also in historic part of Pula, lending a little atmosphere as you sip your Aperol spritz and nibble on a truffle tapa.

→ Kandlerova 34 (052 382 390)

### Helicon Vintage Bar

This is a great in-the-know kind of bar, where local regulars mingle with tourists, with a nice buzz about the place, particularly if there's been a happy hour thrown into the mix. DJs play to all-comers in high season, while autumn and winter lend themselves to themed nights, retro Yugo, that kind of thing. Decor is little but bare brick and a little original art – just goes to show what you can do with the right crowd. Drinks help, of course, craft Croatian beers, draught Paulaner and cocktails served in jar-shaped glasses.

→ Smareglina 2 (095 764 4663, facebook.com/HeliconVintageBar)

### Kod Kadre

On a quiet street behind the Pula Arena a short walk away, Kod Kadre serves massive, but massive, portions of classic Balkan meat dishes, with all the trimmings. Prices are fractionally higher than you'd pay at a completely rock-bottom local corner grill, but you're also getting a little extra quality in terms of salads, ajvar and comfort. The menu is also a little more extensive, with schnitzel and mixed grill options. Come with an appetite.

→ Teslina 51 (052 213 770, facebook.com/Kod.Kadre)

### Konoba Istriana

Way down in the watersports hub of Pomer, the Konoba Istriana knows how to handle boškari ox, scampi and, perhaps the key to why diners come down here from Pula, a peka lid. Succulent seafood and meat dishes are slow-cooked in hot coals, an option you'll need to order a day in advance. Whatever can be home-made, is, such as the pasta, while the prosciutto and vegetables are sourced from close to home. Amalija and Milan Kerniat keep a cosy spot, operating year-round, closed lunchtimes and

Wednesdays in winter.  
→ Pomer 331 (095 395 0914, konoba-istriana.com)

### Old City Bar

This pub-like drinking destination is where to come to watch the match, two big screens set up around the long bar counter lined with tall stools for pint drinkers. There's a kitchen, too, burgers, čevapi and grilled fish enjoyed inside and out, a terrace of red-checked tabletops either covered or catching the sun, as you wish. At the foot of the Venetian citadel, it's all a short walk from the marina and most of the Roman sights. Even in winter, it's almost a 24-hour operation, opening for (very) early morning coffee and closing way past midnight.

→ Danteov trg 1 (052 222 944, facebook.com/oldcity.pula)

### Piazza Nove

Opened just in time to catch the season in July 2018, Piazza Nove does the simple things right, and its location by the Temple of Augustus in the heart of historic Pula keeps the punters coming in. Hulking great burgers are served with fresh accompaniments and a bowl of tasty, hand-cut chips,

or you could opt for something more local and order up a platter of scampi, mussels and blitva. The salads are generally excellent and, given the rows of tables catching the sun in outside, the Piazza Nove is more suitable for lunch after a morning of traipsing round the Pula Arena and waterfront.

→ Kapitolinski trg 9 (092 374 5535, business.facebook.com/piazza.nove.pula)

### Restaurant Oasi

Attached to the four-star boutique hotel of the same name with spa and outdoor pool, the Oasi is unsurprisingly classy, the kind of place that makes it worth the taxi journey from town if you're not staying down here by the marina. Cream of shrimp soup is embellished with fresh black truffles, that's home-made gnocchi with the beef ragout and Grana Padano cheese, the swordfish is marinated in olive oil and herbs while the fillet of sea bass comes in a sauce of sparkling wine. This is also one of the best spots in Pula for steak. Prices are very reasonable for the quality of fare, presentation and service, while the enclosed garden terrace lends a little intimacy.

→ Pješćana uvala X-12A (052 397 910, oasi.hr)

## BEACHES

With the main shipyard in operation here since the mid-1800s, the waterfront in the city centre has long since been given over to industry, but there are plenty of beaches a short bus journey from town.

The main ones are all due south. The nearest ones at Stoja and Lungomare are fine for a paddle – most notably Valkane in Zelenika Bay, with tennis courts nearby. Part of the seafront here is sandy, ideal for children and also adapted for disabled visitors. The next bay along, Gortanova, near the Hotel Pula, also has easy access to the sea, with pine trees close at hand for shade.

A couple of kilometres further south is Verudela, a headland focused on holiday pleasure, dotted with hotels and surrounded by shingle or smooth-stone beaches. Popular ones such as Histria offer plenty of shade, with loungers and umbrellas to rent. Climbing inflatables in the water should keep the kids busy and there's an aquarium at the nearby fortress. On the other side of the fortress, near the Park Plaza Arena hotel, Hawaii beach, aka Havajsko, comprises pebbles that slope ever so gently down into the water, ideal for smaller children a little nervous about going in. As if by contrast, locals use the cliffs alongside to jump off into the sea

– only try this if you know what you're doing.

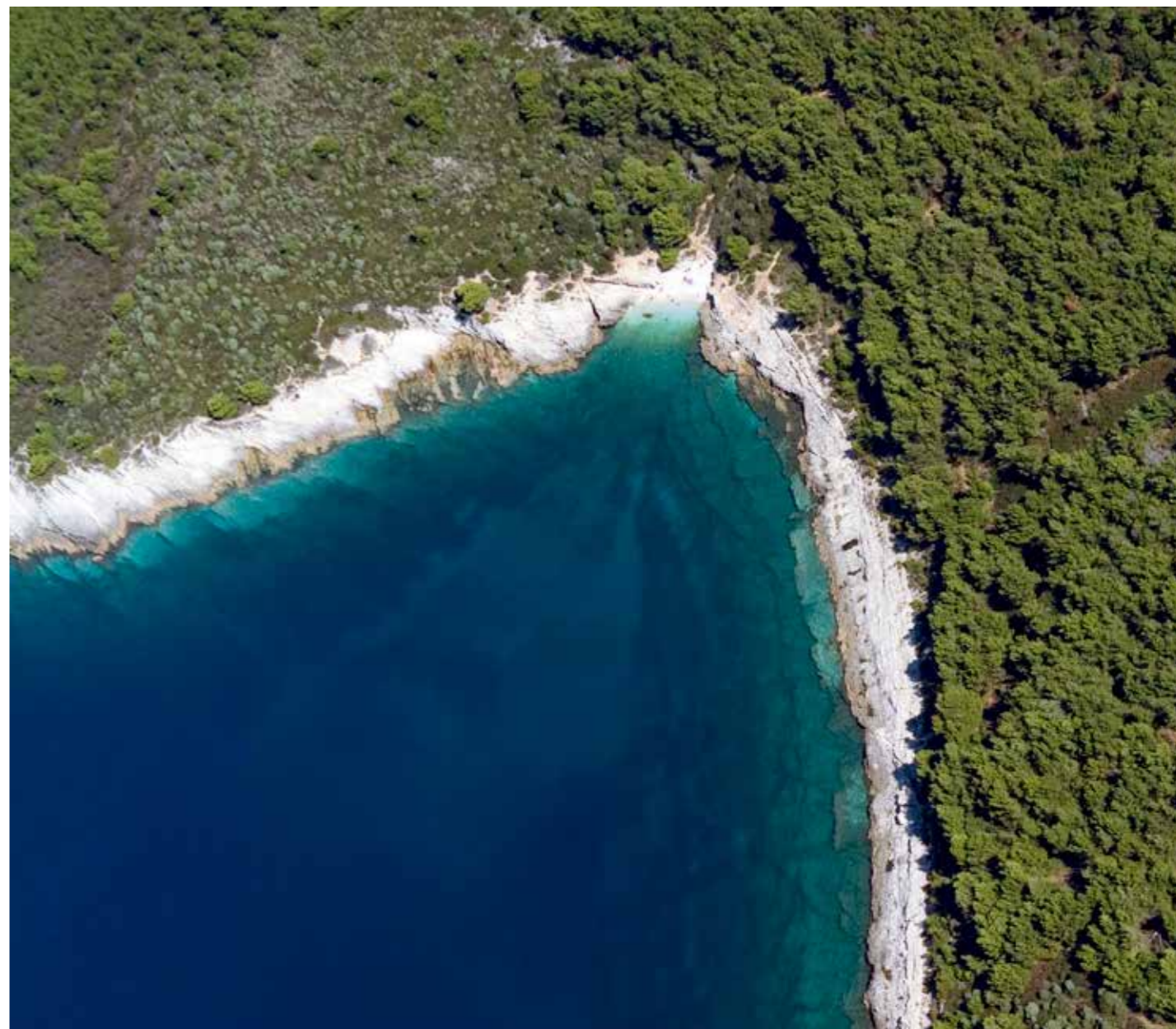
On the same side of the headland as Stoja, as you come into Verudela, Ambrela beach is sandy, the sea clear, with changing cabins and showers alongside. Again, loungers, umbrellas and basic beach amenities such as pedalos can be rented – and, like Histria, Ambrela has been awarded a Blue Flag.

Pula is the gateway to Premantura and Cape Kamenjak, where Istria runs out of land at its far southern tip, some ten to 15 kilometres from town. The sea surrounding this jagged coastline of some 30 kilometres is crystal clear but can be rough the further south you go. Less experienced swimmers should

stick to popular bathing spots such as Stupice near the campsite of the same name, with its tennis and volleyball courts, and windsurfing centre. Convivial Debeljak Bay also attracts bathers, with a beach bar close by.

Dotted around the far southern tip are swimming spots of varying degrees of comfort and safety, usually with makeshift alongside.

Across from the east coast of Premantura, Medulin has been built around holiday fun, with the sandy beach at Pješćana Bay a family favourite. Windsurfing, SUP and diving can all be found nearby. Medulin is a 15- to 20-minute drive from Pula with scores of hotels and campsites should you wish to stay over.



# A cultural tour of Pula

Festivals of film and electronic music, and concerts by everyone from Elton John to José Carreras, fill the 2,000-year-old arena, with its near intact walled ring. Roman remains also form Pula's city centre, dominated by a hilltop Venetian fortress.

**THE BEAUTY** of Pula is that it packs in 3,000 years of history and sights, from classic Roman to cutting-edge contemporary, within a space of under one square kilometre. It can be explored in an hour or two. Or, when there's a festival taking place, a whole day which may well run late into the evening.

The most iconic starting point is, of course, the Amphitheatre, known as the Arena. It was built in the 1st century AD during the reign of Emperor Vespasian, at the same time as the magnificent Colosseum in Rome. But while the Colosseum in Rome all too rarely hosts concerts (and when it does, they're located outside), the

Arena is still very much part of Pula's cultural landscape. All summer long the biggest names in popular music – Luciano Pavarotti, Elton John, David Gilmour (Pink Floyd), Massive Attack, Grace Jones, Sting – perform within its near intact walled ring. Since 1954, the Pula Film Festival has been held here. In fact, the Arena forms part of its logo, the venue now synonymous with an event that once attracted the likes of Sophia Loren and Elizabeth Taylor.

In more recent times, the Arena has also hosted the opening night of the Outlook and Dimensions festivals offer world-renowned acts from the genres of dubstep, techno, hip hop and drum 'n' bass.



Pula Colosseum



Galerija Makina



Museum of Contemporary Art of Istria

In 2018, the festival added another site to its roster: nearby Zerostrasse. Accessed along Carrarina, this series of tunnels was built to protect Pula citizens during air raids, originally for World War I but also for World War II. Renovated and reopened, they now provide a unique, atmospheric space for exhibitions, cultural gatherings and parties.

Heading down Carrarina towards the sea will position you near two of the city's museums, the Olive Oil Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Istria.

Further down Carrarina the other way is the heart of historic Pula, where the Gate of Hercules, the Small Roman Theatre, Twin Gates and the Triumphal Arch of the Sergii are all in fantastic condition.

Rising up behind the Small Roman Theatre, the hill that once housed the prehistoric hill fort settlement is the Kaštel. It was later fortified by the Venetians, and now is where you'll find key cultural institutions such as the Historical & Maritime Museum of Istria, where photographs, maps and videos throw light on Pula's patchwork past. Also here, on one side of the hill, is the Museum and Gallery Sacred Hearts (Sveta Srca), a stunning and prestigious exhibition space set up in a century-old church.

Underneath the Kaštel hill, the original Roman forum is overshadowed by the Temple of Augustus, which was built around 2 BC, the same time as the first wooden arena was built on the site at which the Amphitheatre stands today.

Here, you're a few paces from the Communal Palace, which dates from the 13th century and is today used as the town hall or, further around the Forum, The Punishment of Dirce, an incredibly well preserved but violent floor mosaic which was uncovered following bombing of the city in World War II.

Also close is the Uljanik Shipyard, opened by Habsburg Empress Elisabeth, wife of Franz Josef, in 1856. Ships are still being built here today, but in more recent years the dockyard gained an extra dimension when Croatian lighting designer Dean Skira transformed the cranes into a bright, multi-coloured spectacle. Controlled by a sophisticated remote control system, Lighting Giants flashes out some 16,000 colour combinations every evening from dusk until 10pm, and even until midnight in summer. As well as bringing this historic facility into the 21st century, Lighting Giants has helped to popularise the Visualia Festival, the first of its kind in Croatia. In 2019 it celebrates its seventh year. Running over three days in September, Visualia brings international 3D and lighting artists, showcasing the very latest audiovisual technology.

Bringing history full circle, and spanning 3,000 years of human achievement in Pula, as part of the Visualia Festival in 2015, a record number of people participated in creating a Light Postcard within the Roman Arena. More than 4,000 visitors came together to form the world's largest human torchlit image, spelling out the words 'Pula + Istria' in the city's signature colours of green and yellow.

# Fažana Top 10

This attractive fishing village offers more than just a launchpad to Brijuni islands.

**CLOSE TO PULA**, the fishing settlement of Fažana is usually visited as it's the jumping-off point for boats to the Brijuni Islands, a national park and historical curiosity. Spend time here on the mainland, though, and you'll find a few decent restaurants – Fažana is also known for its sardines, there's even a festival dedicated to them every August – and a scattering of sights and beaches.

## 1 Sample Fažana sardines at the Konoba Batana

Where better to sample Fažana's famed sardines than here at the Konoba Batana, named after the flat-bottomed boats fishermen still take out to sea. You're also right on the waterfront, close to the taxi boat for Brijuni. Sardines can be enjoyed as a cold starter, as part of the fisherman's salad, integral to the fish platter for two or, quite simply, grilled with divine olive oil, sprinkled with lemon and served ten to a plate. There are plenty of other options, of course, such as white fish with blitva greens and classic Balkan carnivorous favourite pljeskavica, a hulking meat patty with ajvar to accompany.

→ Trg stare škola 17 (098 912 7212, batana-fazana.eu)

## 2 Explore a World War I German submarine

Fažana's main diving centre, Hippocampus takes divers of varying abilities to several interesting wrecks within easy reach of this part of the coast. Close to Pula, the so-called Submarine 82 was sunk by the Germans themselves towards the end of

World War I. At a depth of some 36 metres, it lies close to Stoja beach, its stern open, allowing divers to peek in and see what's left of the military equipment a century later. Other nearby wrecks include an Italian minesweeper, a Yugoslav tugboat and Italian cargo ship that sank in 1915. Hippocampus also offers scuba-diving courses for adults and children, minimum age ten.

→ Autocamp BiVillage, Dragonja 115 (099 400 6922, hippocampus.hr)

## 3 Visit a church from the sixth century

A few hundred metres from the modest centre of Fažana stands Sv Elizeja, a simple church the size and shape of a small house. There's little by way of decoration – in fact, there's little by way of any glass at all – although early Christian symbols and graves have been found alongside. Like the church itself, they dated back some 1,500 years, shortly after the Romans left Croatia. Sv Elizeja is still in use today – a concert takes place here on World Music Day in June. Put svetog Elizeja

## 4 Cycle the St Elyseus route

Taking its name from the sixth-century church you'll be passing on the way, the St Elyseus route is ideal for first-time visitors who would like to see what Fažana has to offer but aren't looking for too much of a challenge when they take to the saddle. Starting at Fažana car park near the jetty, the trail runs along the riviera, heads down to the BiVillage Holiday Centre at Valbandon, cuts up past vineyards and olive groves, then takes you past Sv Elizeja Church.



Past the pines, you are treated to fine views of the Brijuni Islands just offshore. The entire 11-kilometre journey is on asphalt or tarmac, and should take you an hour – ideal before you finish back at the car park and hop onto your boat for Brijuni. Ask at the nearby Fažana Tourist Office (ulica Titova Riva 2, infofazana.hr) about cycle hire. → istria-bike.com

## 5 Frolic on the beach

Fažana is lined with beaches. From the simple purity of Stara ('Old') Fažana in the north to the main public beach with tiki-style sunshades, to San Lorenzo with its popular seafront bar, a stroll along the waterfront all the way to Valbandon brings you to the BiVillage Holiday Centre. Part of this all-in-one complex of pools, an adventure park, villas, apartments and a campsite, is the Beach BiVillage, kept pristine for holidaymakers. A little further along, the Sunset Beach Bar Valbandon is where you can rent

out a sun loungers, sunshades and order cold beers at your leisure.

## 6 Pay your respects to Mate Parlov

On a patch of greenery tucked in from the Fažana seafront, a bronze statue of a boxer in action is complemented by two simple words below the plinth: Mate Parlov. No mention of Parlov's Olympic gold at Munich in 1972, no mention of his world and European amateur title wins, no mention of his achievements as a boxing coach when he led Yugoslavia to their best results at an Olympic Games, in 1984. But then again, many older Croats know these things anyway – the Split-born pugilist was eight times champion of Yugoslavia. In his later years, Parlov retired to run a bar in Pula and spend time out of the limelight here in Fažana, taking in the sunset here on the waterfront, the rays now catching his statue at the most photogenic time of day.

## 7 Savour seafood at Konoba Feral

Echoing Fažana's fishing heritage, the red-fronted Konoba Feral just in from the seafront has as wide a choice of fish and seafood as you'll find anywhere on this part of the Istrian coast. Lobster, Jacob's mussels, shrimp buzara-style, scorpion fish, all kinds of white fish and, of course, sardines – all go well with the affordable house wine and can be enjoyed in the traditional interior or on the Roman-style terrace alongside. There are Istrian specialities, too, pršut ham, sausage, ombolo pork loin and manestra soup. If you're going to have one meal in Fažana, this would be a wise choice. → Boraca 11 (052 520 040, restaurant-feral.com)

## 8 Admire the wildlife of Valbandon

Just south of Fažana, the Valbandon estuary is where seawater and freshwater mingle. The varied plant life here – sea

lavender, alkali grass, sea aster – makes it attractive to all kinds of birds and insects. Dragonflies, coots, egrets, kingfishers and herons are fairly common sights. At night, bats fill the skies, enjoying the rich pickings of insects. Ask for further details about what to see, and which times of the year, at the Fažana Tourist Office (ulica Titova Riva 2, infofazana.hr) by the jetty.

## 9 Discover Brijuni

There's nothing quite like Brijuni. One of Croatia's most popular attractions, it's accessed by regular taxi boat from Fažana. This takes you to Veliki ('Great') Brijun, the only one of the 14 islands in the archipelago catering to tourists. Brijuni made its name when post-war leader of Yugoslavia, Tito, made it his base at certain times of the year, inviting film stars and leaders of other countries not aligned to the USA or USSR. This, in turn, led to the heads of African and Asian nations bringing Tito gifts – elephants, zebras

and other exotic creatures that formed a safari park here. Some can still be seen, if you hop aboard the little tourist train that chugs round the island. Have a look out, too, for the Roman remains and authentic dinosaur footprints, when Brijuni really was an animal kingdom. All is explained on the map you'll see as you disembark onto the island. → brijuni.hr

## 10 Drink and dine surrounded by greenery

The Arboretum Pub is just that – a pub where you can sample the latest Croatian craft beer and sink your teeth into a burger, surrounded by greenery cultivated for educational or scientific interest. Giving new meaning to the concept of a beer garden, the Arboretum Pub puts on events such as beer yoga, jazz weeks and screenings of major football tournaments. Eminently child- and dog-friendly. → Galizanska cesta 8 (098 926 9292, facebook.com/pg/arboretumpub)

## BEACHES

Fažana is a resort in its own right. Close to the jetty for taxi boats to Brijuni, Stara ('Old') Fažana beach offers the simple pleasures of a concrete boardwalk, pebble-covered waterfront, something for kids to bounce around on, and loungers to hire.

You can then stroll due south along the whole seafront, first calling at San Lorenzo with a couple of bars close by, then keep going all the way towards Valbandon.

Past a sea-kayak and boat rental spot by La Pineta restaurant, you reach the BiVillage Holiday Centre. Part of this all-in-one complex of pools, adventure park, and resort lodgings, is the Beach BiVillage, kept pristine for holidaymakers. A little further along, the Sunset Beach Bar Valbandon is where you can rent out a sun loungers, sunshades and order cold beers at your leisure.

# Rovinj Top 20

Rovinj is Istria at its most chic, a scenic resort of quality restaurants and cocktail bars, galleries and boutiques.

**ROVINJ** is Istria at its most chic, a scenic resort of quality restaurants and cocktail bars, galleries and boutiques. Stone houses and cobbled streets lend an authentic air – this is also the most gay-friendly of Croatia’s coastal destinations.

A cocktail would seem apt, and there are plenty of choices, or there’s Istrian Favorit beer on tap, affordable house wine and juices for the kids. There’s no food to speak of but that can all come later.  
→ Trg Sv Eufemije (098 814 445, facebook.com/Caffe-bar-XL)

**1 Bask in Rovinj’s finest sunset**  
Perched by the Church of St Euphemia atop the Old Town, Caffe Bar XL is the perfect spot for a bar. Wicker chairs and wooden tables overlook fields, then the Adriatic beyond, streaked with amber beams of sunset if you find a spot at the right time of day.

**2 Do lunch by the pool**  
Ulika Rovinj is an upscale camping complex just outside Rovinj, a short walk from the beach. Here, from March to October, Barba Danilo is a gourmet corner that revives the restaurant the same family once ran before setting up this luxury lodging. Tables and chairs are



the lively artistic life of Rovinj dates back to a first exhibition here in 1967 – 50th anniversary events took place in 2017. As well as paintings, mounted for display in doorways and on Grisija’s stone walls, stalls proffer all kinds of artisanal artefacts. If you’re here on the second Sunday in August, an outdoor festival allows anyone to set up and sell their art. Among the amateur seascapes, you might find the odd gem.

**4 Sail over to Sveta Katarina**  
The closest island to Rovinj harbour, Sveta Katarina was the playground of various counts and dukes in the Habsburg days, the forerunners of today’s pleasure seekers. The photos you may have seen of foolhardy tourists leaping from high rocks into the sea were taken here. More sedate holiday-makers make do with catching the frequent ferry over, wandering around the verdant pathways, past vineyards and ancient olive trees, to find their own spot at a deserted and invariably rocky part of the coast. If you haven’t brought any refreshments, you’ll find the bar and restaurant open at the island’s namesake hotel, a family-focused resort complex with tennis courts, swimming pools and water sports.  
→ maistra.com/island-hotel-katarina-rovinj



ranged around the swimming pool and a tasteful interior, where lunch (noon-2.30pm) consists of salads, light snacks and tapas, and dinner of Istrian classics given a contemporary twist. Wines and olive oils are immaculately sourced – then again, the family has had lots of practice.  
→ Polari 5 (052 830 002, dn-rovinj.com/english\_ulika\_rovinj)

**3 Amble along Grisija**  
Always bustling in summer, stone-paved Grisija is a colourful thoroughfare of ateliers and artists’ galleries that leads up to the Church of St Euphemia. Its role in





**5 Sip champagne at Valentino**

'A world of its own' is the motto of pricy Valentino, Rovinj's most celebrated drinkerie, opened way before the boom in Croatia – way before an independent Croatia itself, in fact, in 1989. Back then, the owners knew that Valentino's dramatic location, washed by the waves near Rovinj harbour, would bring results. Keeping things classic and old school, they gradually encouraged customers to plonk themselves down on the rocky waterfront, offering brightly coloured cushions and ever more authentic – and expensive – mixed drinks. These days, Valentino is officially a 'cocktail & champagne bar', bubbly accounting for as much trade as bloody Marys. Step off the seaside street, lose the crowds and commune with nature, your cocktail and your companion.

→ Santa Croce 28 (052 830 683, [valentino-rovinj.com](http://valentino-rovinj.com))

**6 Take a taxi boat to Sveti Andrija Island**

Just off the coast of Rovinj, Sveti Andrija Island (also known as 'Red Island') is a handy and

easy getaway from the crowds thanks to a boat that heads out from the town harbour every hour. This is, in fact, two islands in one, Sveti Andrija and Maškin. The larger Sveti Andrija was where Benedictine monks opened a church in the sixth century, rebuilt by the Franciscans 900 years later.

After Napoleon chased them off, the island was pretty much deserted until the well-to-do Habsburg Hutterotts erected a family mansion and surrounded it with hundreds of plants and trees from around the world – these you still see, and smell, today. The family mausoleum can also be visited. Most come here for the secluded beaches, though, backdropped by scented pine trees and facing clearer waters than found immediately around Rovinj itself. Although your boat over will invariably be crowded, it's easy to find your own space for that real away-from-it-all feeling.

→ [maistra.com/island-hotel-istra-rovinj](http://maistra.com/island-hotel-istra-rovinj)

**7 Discover a little culinary gem**

Tucked in behind the marina, Segutra is one of those places that the first-time visitor may not stumble over but longer-term residents now swear by – and keep quiet about. Modestly small, with a scattering of tables outside, Segutra chalks up its specials on the board outside. The tuna, salmon, sardines and top-class white fish are grilled just right, the steak equally. Service and presentation are impeccable, the atmosphere informal – but there's serious work going on in the kitchen. Open from Easter until October.

→ Vrata pod zidom 4 (052 812 004)

**8 Discover Rovinj history by rowboat**

Batana House is perhaps the

first multi-media museum around the Mediterranean specifically dedicated to a fishing boat. The vessel in question is the batana, the traditional wooden boat of this region. It is still very much in use today – as you will find out should you head out at sunset in a batana expertly rowed by the one of the museum staff. As both sit in the romantically lit batana, they will explain the importance of the boat to Rovinj's history and economy, from the intricacies of night fishing to the construction of the vessel itself. If you're here in daytime, the museum uses film, music and interactive exhibits to tell the same story – creative workshops allow you to try your hand at making fishing nets or plaiting demijohns.

→ Obala P. Budicina 2 (052 812 593, [www.batana.org](http://www.batana.org))

**9 Admire brave St Euphemia**

Thrown to the lions in AD303 though apparently mauled to death by a bear, poor St Euphemia is venerated in the Eastern Orthodox faith. How her relics came to be placed in a sarcophagus in Rovinj is not entirely clear – legend has it that her coffin washed ashore here, though other remains are still placed in the Church of St George in Istanbul, where she met her fate. The Rovinj church that bears her name, built in Baroque style in 1736, stands on the site of an earlier one also named after St George. Euphemia is represented in statue form, somewhat prosaically converted into a weather

vane, while the mural of her martyrdom feels more reverential, the pious saint soon to join the heavenly chorus as lions devour her limbs.

**10 Go the whole seven courses at Monte**

Shellfish, suckling pig and that day's catch, the seven-course menu at recently Michelin-starred Monte takes in the bounty of Istria on land and sea. Closer to home, Dutch-Croatian restaurateurs Tjitske and Danijel Đekić raid nearby Rovinj market on a daily basis for the finest, freshest produce to supply the most versatile kitchen in town. There's a five-course menu, too, and carefully conceived main-course options. There's a choice from more than 100 wines to accompany. Set on a steep cobbled slope in Rovinj's historic centre, considering the quality of fare on offer, Monte could be starched and stuffy but it's anything but – all feels funky and informal, just the right combination for a relaxed, top-class dining experience.

→ Montalbano 75 (052 830 203, [www.monte.hr](http://www.monte.hr))

**11 Sink your teeth into steak**

Opened in 2017, the Steakhouse & Pub Istriano doesn't beat around the bush. It serves steak, house-style thick and juicy, with simple trimmings such as grana padano cheese, rucola and potatoes. It's pretty serious about its beers, too, hosting its own Bavarian-style Oktoberfest, where litre-tall glasses are clinked over hearty portions of pork. The rest of the year, the menu changes weekly – steak is a constant, of course – which means that fish options alternate from tuna to bream. There's always a vegetarian choice, too, and often a little live music in the evenings.

→ Stjepana Radića (052 524 713, [facebook.com/istrianoRv](http://facebook.com/istrianoRv))

**12 Spoil yourself on a gooey dessert**

The first thing you notice when you walk into the Orange Bar, just in from Rovinj's seafront, is its encyclopaedic dessert menu. Actually, that's a complete lie. The very first you notice are the boats brimming with ice-cream concoctions, lavish sauces and little umbrellas being served to a nearby table – and, there being nothing worse than

ice-cream envy, you just have to order the same. Presented in a tall glass, sundae bowl or dessert boats, the puddings here attract families all day long. Once the children have gone to bed, the grown-ups can come out and play, and lay into one of the fine cocktails that the Orange Bar is also known for.

→ Obala palih boraca 4 ([facebook.com/pages/The-Orange-Bar](http://facebook.com/pages/The-Orange-Bar))

**13 Sample the wines at Villa Dobravac**

A short taxi hop from the centre of Rovinj, the family estate of Villa Dobravac is where you'll find comfortable accommodation with sea views, and an expertly stocked wine cellar containing six labels produced on-site. Fuga blends Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon, while Toccata adds Teran to the mix. Tours and tastings are also laid on, as well as sampling of own-made olive oil and marmalade.

→ Karmelo 1 (052 813 006, [villa-dobravac.com](http://villa-dobravac.com))

**14 Stroll the Golden Cape**

For serious, pine-forested beaches, head south of Rovinj, past the marina, to the wooded peninsula of Zlatni rt, or Golden Cape. The stroll along the waterfront is a little more than a kilometre from town. There's also a cluster of resorts around here, but they're uphill, so the beaches are mostly undisturbed

nature. Here shade-providing pine forests grow right up to the shore, ending in rocky beaches. You'll need sandals to wade on the jagged shore, but the lack of sand means the sea is incredibly clear, great for snorkelling or diving. Walking further round, past Lone Bay, with its public changing cabins, smaller coves have shallow, calm waters ideally suited to paddling toddlers.

**15 Sink Guinness and mingle with locals**

The only 'Irish Pub' in town isn't, really – but the Art Public Bar is a damn good local drinking institution nonetheless. The taps of Guinness and Kilkenny, and surprisingly wide range of Irish whiskeys available, allow management to place the sign 'Irish Pub' over the doorway, hence the confusion. Unplugged sessions towards the end of the week and DJ parties at weekends attract a regular local trade, and though tourists are most certainly welcome, this is one bar where they don't swamp the place.

→ Carrera 88A (091 519 1340, [facebook.com/Art-Public-Bar](http://facebook.com/Art-Public-Bar))

**16 Visit the Adriatic Titanic**

Known as the Adriatic Titanic, the Baron Gautsch was a Habsburg passenger ship that hit a mine laid by the Austro-Hungarian navy off the coast of Istria at the start of World War I. Nearly 150

passengers and crew lost their lives and the ship sank to a depth of 35 metres. The wreck, discovered in 1958, now provides divers with one of Europe's most fascinating sites, and a popular for trips from Rovinj. Based at the Hotel Istra on Sveti Andrija Island, the Dive Center Rubin offers escorted dives to the old ship, as well as courses for children and beginners.

→ Otok Sveti Andrija (052 802 540, [rovinjdiving.com](http://rovinjdiving.com))

**17 Dine amid contemporary architecture**

Independent four-star hotel Arupinum has a restaurant of the same name, where fresh, seasonal ingredients are brought to the fore and home-made pasta is prominent. Given that warmer evenings and a larger influx of guests allow tables to be taken out and ranged around the pool, the whole ambience feels very Mediterranean, accentuated by the sleek, contemporary architecture that defines this recently opened establishment. All takes place just outside the centre of Rovinj, in an enclave of luxury lodging that also includes the stand-out Hotel Lone.

→ Luje Adamovića 29 (052 853 750, [arupinum-rovinj.com](http://arupinum-rovinj.com))

**18 Cycle the Limes Trail**

A journey of nearly 40km, three-quarters of it on



Monte Restaurant



St Euphemia



Hotel Lone

## Rovinj

tarmac, the Limes Trail starts and ends at the Amarin Tourist Resort just north of Rovinj and takes three hours. The route takes you through Saline, Valalta, Rovinjsko Selo and Porton Biondi, through lovely landscapes and past several churches, St Martin's viewpoint and the Maklavun archaeological site. Around Rovinjsko Selo, you should also notice the kažuni, a field shelter of dry stone walls, along with the pre-historic fortress of Turnina.

→ [istria-bike.com](#)

## 19 Meet Old Masters and modern locals

Founded by a group of local artists in 1954, the Rovinj Heritage Museum houses Istria's prime collection of Italian art from the 1400s onwards. Renaissance gems by the great Venetian Giovanni Bellini and the school of Bonifazio de Pitati share second-floor space with Baroque painter such as Nicolò Grassi, Antonio Zanchi and Marco Ricci. One flight below is a floor of Croatian art from the later 20th century and there's also a section dedicated to Rovinj artists from the same period – some of whom would have helped set up this very museum. Summer sees a flurry of temporary exhibitions by local artists – and also big international names and genres such as Picasso, Dalí, Chagall and Pop Art.

→ Trg marseala Tita 11 (052 816 720, [muzej-rovinj.hr](#))

## 20 Try out Rovinj's most ambitious eatery

Relatively new in the culinary stakes, Bookeria by prominent Trg Pignaton in Rovinj's historic centre is nothing if not ambitious. At this prime location, it would be all too easy for this eatery – it feels too informal and laid-back to be called a restaurant, though it takes its cooking seriously – to fill the menu with the usual suspects and cash in. Not a bit of it. Here crabs and scallops feature prominently, such as the crab ravioli, and scallops in various sauces. The fish is fresh and accompanied by a sprinkling of spinach and pine nuts, rather than a dollop of the usual watery blitva. Great care is also taken over dessert, semifreddo or home-made ice cream. A sun-catching terrace completes the picture.

→ Trg Pignaton 7 (091 219 0007, [facebook.com/bookeriarovinj](#))

## BEST OF THE REST

### Brasserie Adriatic

The Brasserie Adriatic harks back to the classic era of fin-de-siècle French cuisine and the heritage of the surrounding hotel, which dates back to 1913 and the earliest days of tourism in Rovinj. Set in the centre of town, overlooking the main square and the harbour, the Brasserie Adriatic also brings a contemporary touch to the kitchen, with tuna tataki as part of the Adriatic mixed starter, polenta with crab and chive oil as a warm starter, gilt-head bream sous-vide as a main, and pistachio tuile with chocolate for the pot de crème dessert. The decor is equally 21st-century, shiny industrial in feel offset by walls of glass.

→ Obala Riva Budicina 16 (052 803 510, [maistra.com/hotel-adriatic-rovinj/sub/brasserie-adriatic](#))

### Café Bar Limbo

The Limbo provides you with one of those classic Rovinj experiences, ever so slightly quirky, all in very good taste, and offering quality throughout. Here you perch on a stool or brightly coloured cushion on the steps of a steep walkway – hence 'Limbo' – while sipping on fine Istrian wine or, ideal for early evening, an Aperol spritz. There are appetisers, too, platters of prosciutto and cheese – but given the location close to a dozen restaurants, you're as well using this as a pre-meal pick-me-up.

→ Casale 22B (091 570 5318)

### Konoba Jure

On the outskirts of Rovinj, surrounded by holiday apartments, the year-round Konoba Jure does a fine job with classic Istrian cuisine, the fish fresh, the Malvasia wine crisp. Thin pljukanci pasta with shrimp is a particular speciality, as is the fish soup. No menu, so ask your waiter what's good that day. Ulica Cardemia 22 (052 813 397)

### La Puntulina

Perched on a drop above the sea, this spot adds a gourmet Italian touch to local cuisine. La Puntulina has been run by the same Pellizzer family since 2004 and prides itself on fresh ingredients, creative sauces and a careful mix of flavours. The fish fillet Puntulina, with a delicately spiced tomato sauce, the bass stuffed with

shrimp and the fish in an olive crust provide exciting ways to enjoy fresh seafood. Meat options include turkey fillet with pine nuts and steak on rocket and cherry tomatoes. It's also a wine bar, with a dozen Malvazijas alone to choose from. Reserve the table by the window for dramatic sea views.

→ Sv Križa 38 (052 813 186, [puntulina.eu](#))

### Mediterraneo Bar Rovinj

Lapped, literally, by the Adriatic, the Mediterraneo is one of those stupendously well located drinking spots bathed in orange sunset, where they could serve gruel in a glass and still have everyone smiling for selfies while they drink it. There's no gruel here, of course, only quality mixed drinks at reasonable prices – and the setting does the rest. Open well into October, so if you're here out of season, you can still enjoy a scenic drink, just take advantage of one of the free blankets.

→ Sv Križa 24 (091 532 8357, [facebook.com/mediterraneo.rovinj](#))

### Snack Bar Rio

Run by the same Pellizzer family that made La Puntulina such a mainstay of the local dining scene, the Snack Bar Rio is a real surprise in that it's almost anything but a snack bar. Here you do battle with lobster, tuck into fine fish or enjoy a plate of perfectly prepared pasta and seafood, in informal, café-like surroundings – the Rio opened as a bar in 1968 and still operates as a place to catch the sun on the terrace over your first coffee of the morning.

→ Obala Alda Rismonda 13 (052 813 564)

### Veli Jože

Istrian-style dishes comprise the menu at this quaint spot near the harbour with a high-ceilinged interior crammed with antiques and sea-going kitsch. There is seating for 40 on a pavement terrace. Specialities include shellfish lasagne, crab with truffles, cod in white wine and baked lamb with potatoes. Sv Križa 1 (091 052 816 337, [velijoze.net/vj.html](#))

## BEACHES

**POPULAR WITH LOCALS** is the small swimming area, consisting of rocks and concreted platforms, on the south side of the Old Town peninsula. For the pine-forested beaches at the edge of town,

you'll need sandals to wade on the jagged shore, but the lack of sand means the sea is incredibly clear, great for snorkelling or diving.

The walk along the water is a little more than a kilometre from town: head past the Hotel Park, to the area of Monte Mulini and the succession of pebbly coves that forms the south side of Lone Bay. Relandscaped in 2014, Mulini beach itself combines smooth concrete with natural rock for comfort and authenticity, with a decent beach bar alongside and plenty of things to hire and play on in the water.

The bay culminates in the pine-fringed peninsula of Zlatni Rt (Golden Cape), featuring a family-friendly beach of fine gravel. The other beaches are mostly undisturbed nature, ending in rocky beaches. Walking further round, past Lone Bay, with its public changing cabins, smaller coves have shallow, the calm waters of Kuvi beach ideally suited to paddling toddlers.

About three kilometres south of town there are two nudist beaches, Polari Bay and the adjacent Cape Eve.

In the opposite direction, a short walk north of the town centre, Porton Biondi is a popular public beach with no natural shade but sun loungers and umbrellas for hire. There's also a scuba-diving centre alongside, along with a number of bars and eateries. It may be worth the ten to 15-minute trek further north, to Borik beach, for its sheltering greenery, clearer water, finer pebbles and showers.

From here, a path leads you through to Valdaliso beach, part of the campsite of the same name, so a modest fee is charged to enter. On the plus side, it's cleaned every day, and offers tennis courts, windsurfing, beach volleyball and a children's playground – if you're here with the family, it's worth the admission. Close by, Amarin beach is also pristine, with showers, changing cabins and easy access into the water, so suitable for youngsters. Again, this is part of a larger resort, so daily admission is charged to outsiders.

To get away from it all, take the taxi boat over from the Old Town to Sv Katarina Island, where you'll find rocky/pebbly beaches with few amenities but wonderful views of Rovinj across the water. Nearby hidden coves provide intimacy.



## ISTRIA | CROATIA

On the magnificent coast of Istria (Croatia), right below the Lim Fjord, is the most romantic place in the Mediterranean! The town of Rovinj is the right destination for all of you seeking a sentimental atmosphere of the times that have forever gone by. In the Mediterranean, you can find it here, in the town that has begun its romantic life on an island, its restricted area resulting in crowded houses, narrow streets and small squares, still untouched by modern urbanism. On the seaside, the town is protected by a high rocky shore and house walls built on cliffs, while the mainland side is protected by solid walls. The town is dominated by the baroque St. Euphemia's Church, its 60-meter tower providing a view of grey and red rooftops and chimneys, streets and squares, the port and pier with ships and boats, and the marina harbouring yachts. This unique old town core, the 67-kilometer shoreline, 2,289 ha of protected green surfaces and improved park forests, 16 islands, islets and reefs, make this town unique. Built upon a rich fishermen's tradition, it has become distinctive for its unique boat called batana and its songs bitinada. Its beauty was particularly appreciated by artists who have painted the most beautiful motifs here and exhibited them on Grisia, the street of artists.

This is place providing endless options - walks in wonderful nature, sport and recreation activities, sailing, diving, climbing, biking, discovering hidden beauties, cultural antiques, archaeological sites and culinary specialties, all combined with accommodation in high-quality hotels, tourist resorts and camps providing numerous possibilities for a pleasant holiday, wellness delights, business conferences and sporting activities.

Romantic and mysterious, yet full of options for an unforgettable time, Rovinj has become and will remain a town you want to revisit.



# Vrsar, Funtana & Limski Canal Top 20

Travellers can visit the Limski kanal and its wealth of oysters before making their way to the pleasant towns of Funtana and Vrsar



Parish Church of St. Martin



Limski Canal

**AN ISTRIA IN MINIATURE.** Vrsar is a medieval hilltop town perched above the mouth to the Limski Canal. The setting couldn't be more dramatic, Limski a 12-kilometre long sliver of sea that cuts straight into the heart of the Istrian peninsula. Forested cliffs rise to a height of 150 metres and backdrop the canal's clear water of emerald green. Filmmakers have used it as a convincing location for Viking dramas. Near Vrsar, Funtana is a popular resort equipped with a large marina, while tucked inland from the Limski Canal, the villages of Dvigrad and Mrgani hark back to a piratical past.

**1 Have a memorable meal in a retro restaurant**  
Don't be put off by the 1970s exterior or the steep flight of steps leading up to this

first-floor location. The Trošt is most probably the best restaurant in Vrsar. The large terrace has a wonderful view out over the harbour. Inside there are two dining areas. The smaller room has an open fireplace – employed in the cooking of some dishes – wooden beams and rustic walls. The second space is rather more formal, with sliding glass doors that open out onto the terrace in summer. The high quality of both the food and the service is happily accompanied by reasonable prices. Unsurprisingly, Željko Brajković's menu majors on fresh fish and seafood – house specialities include Istrian-style squid with polenta, grilled monkfish and fish baked with potatoes under hot ashes. Booking essential.  
→ Obala Maršala Tita 1A (052 445 197, restoran-trost.hr)

**2 Take a boat up the Limski Canal**  
Several companies offer boat tours of the fjord-like Limski Canal – perhaps the most visitor-friendly is the four-hour jaunt run by Rovinj-based Excursions Delfin. Setting off from Rovinj harbour at 1pm daily in high season, a pretty boat with a top deck for prime sightseeing takes four hours to explore the green waters of canal, with its steep, forested slopes and plentiful oyster beds. Much is made of the canal's piratical past – the boat makes a 20-minute stop in front of a cave thought to have been used by Captain Morgan himself. The trip finishes back in Rovinj.  
→ excursion-delfin.com

**3 Be at one with nature**  
Every summer without fail, thousands of tourists

head for the large campsite at Koversada, between Vrsar and the Limski Canal. In itself, this is nothing unusual, only that everyone will then discard their clothes and spend pretty much the entire holiday naked. This self-contained holiday 'town' is right on the beach and offers naturists all they could wish for. Istria has a long tradition of nudism but Koversada is the original and probably still the best resort. Its undisputable claim to fame is having been the one and only destination of its kind behind the Iron Curtain – Koversada opened as far back as 1961. Its popularity remains undimmed. If you're in need of a little comfort as well, then Koversada also offers four-star, two-person apartments.  
→ Koversada 1, Vrsar (052 800 200, www.maistracamping.com)

**4 Enjoy a harbourside drink in Vrsar**  
Although the building is rather retro and the venues small, Nieves is Vrsar's focal bar in summer. Looking out over the harbourfront, with a couple of other cafés, ice-cream shops and eateries for company, it attracts families by day, and discerning beer drinkers by night, now that Nieves has followed recent trends and begun stocking a number of more sought-after domestic ales rather than the ubiquitous Croatian lagers. At the height of high season, a couple of decent musicians will be bashing out a few blues and R&B tunes to give the evening a little swing.  
→ Obala maršala Tita 23A, Vrsar (052 442 325, 091 5203 913)

**5 Meet the Borisis**  
Originally from Bar in modern-day Montenegro,

the Borisi clan moved up the Adriatic in the late 1500s to escape the Turks. Eventually settling in Funtana, they built the church that dominates the town centre today. Dating back to 1621, the Parish Church of St Bernard features a 34-metre-high tower, of classic white stone. Within, along with a 17th-century painting of Mary and child, are the tomb of one of the Borisi clan and the family coat of arms on a memorial plate. Alongside stands the two-floor Villa Borisi, dating back a decade earlier, built by Borisi patriarch Bernardo, originally Renaissance, later augmented with Baroque touches. Kept in the family despite Count Borisi's later eight-year trial and conviction for murder, it passed into Habsburg, Italian then Yugoslav hands. Today it remains closed to the public.

**6 Savour the freshest oysters**  
A modest shack stuck out on a jetty at this inland end of the Limski Canal houses a remarkable one-man operation. Offering some of the finest, freshest shellfish you'll find, its oysters a fraction of the price that you'd pay in Paris, Istrida aka Tony's Oyster Shack has been in business for more than 15 years. During this time, owner Emir Sošić has managed to develop his shellfish farm so that he now delivers to restaurants across Istria. Individual customers can still turn up on spec and pay a little over €1 for each divine oyster, flavoured with a touch of lemon. Emir also sells mussels by the kilo.  
→ istrida.com

**7 Visit an abandoned city**  
Settled by ancient Illyrians even before the Romans reached Istria, Dvigrad in the Lim Valley was considered important enough to have a pair of fortresses built there in medieval times, hence its name of Two Castles ('Dvigrad'). This made it important enough to be sacked by various invaders, first the Genoese, then the Venetians and finally by Uskok pirates. Plague and malaria did the rest. By the early 1700s, the last citizens abandoned Dvigrad to its fate. Curious visitors 300 years later find ghostly remains and overgrown fortifications – although moves are afoot to preserve what's left.

**8 Tour Vrsar in a semi-submarine**

Moored in summer on the main waterfront Vrsar, this bright red semi-submarine is just that – a tourist-friendly vessel that half-submerges as its sets off from Obala maršala Tita, allowing those above to enjoy the sea views and those below to explore the life underwater. Large windows expose the darting fish and shy shellfish – the bottom of the craft reaches down to a depth of nearly 1.5 metres. After the tour is over, you come back to the same spot where you set off, facing the little island of Sveti Juraj beside Belvedere beach.

→ Obala maršala Tita 14, Vrsar (095 444 1040, semisubmarine-vrsar.com)

**9 Take the kids to a dinosaur park**

Just outside Funtana, Dino Park is the first of its kind in Croatia, a themed amusement park set in an old stone quarry, large enough to accommodate moving life-size dinosaur models. Around it are ranged all kinds of family-friendly entertainment, a children's train, a mini dinosaur-themed cinema, a pirate ship, a carousel, trampolines, a playground and a prehistoric workshop. A nature trail 1.5km long also gives visitors young and

old an idea of what the dinosaur era was like – some of the most important prehistoric finds have been unearthed around Istria. Along with the pony rides, dinosaur rides and circus performances, all attractions are free once you pay a one-off admission.

→ Istarska ulica, Funtana (052 4456 327, dinopark.hr)

**10 Party at Casanova**

Named after Vrsar's most notorious former resident, the Casanova Beach Club near Montraker has been the local party spot for many a year. And every year, it seems, the season lasts longer, with the 2018 big closing party taking place on September 28. Before that big shebang, from late April onwards, local DJs provide the dance sounds, bar staff mix decent, affordable cocktails and the beach and sunset do the rest. By day, have the kitchen fix you a pizza and spent the afternoon relaxing in a deckchair.

→ Vrsar (091 206 2987, m.facebook.com/casanova.beachbar)

**11 Hop over to an uninhabited island**

Facing directly opposite Vrsar, the island of Sveti Juraj was a hive of activity nearly 2,000

years ago. The stone quarry that once operated here supplied the materials for construction not only nearby, but as far away as Ravenna, historians now think. The Church of St George still standing in the middle of the island was built in the early days of Croatian culture, with a double-apse, as was the style of the time. Rather than left abandoned, the church was completely restored in the mid-1990s and is the scene of celebrations every April 23, St George's Day, when locals come over on fishing boats for this annual communal event. The rest of the year, the island is silent, but a modest fee should persuade a local fisherman to transport you over the short distance from Vrsar.

**12 Dine like a Viking**

In 1963, Hollywood superstar Richard Widmark and scores of extras in Viking helmets descended on the Limski Canal to film the swashbuckling big-screen movie *The Long Ships*. With this dramatic part of Istria standing in for the fjords of Scandinavia, the production saved the film company considerable expense being on location for six weeks in what was then Yugoslavia. It also allowed savvy locals to open a large-scale restaurant, Fjord. Still in operation today,

this 250-seater features an open terrace overlooking the canal, shortly before it ends its journey a quarter of the way into the Istrian peninsula. Here, you can tuck into mussels cooked with garlic and white wine, or the oysters for which the Limski Canal is famous. The white fish is similarly excellent. Similarly, set back a little from the water's edge, the Viking restaurant also has uninterrupted views of Limski's green waters. Oysters are, understandably, the house speciality but the seasonal range of fresh shellfish is formidable. Particularly good is the lobster – served buzara style on a bed of pasta. Viking also specialises in white-fleshed sea-fish such as sea bass, dentex, John Dory, gilthead and grouper.

→ Fjord 052 448 222; Viking 052 448 119

**13 Rent a boat and explore**

Based at the marina that dominates the main seafront at Funtana, Istra Nautika has all kinds of boats for rental, with or without a skipper. Vessels run from a basic Reful and its 30-litre tank to a six-metre Barracuda SX, with a sundeck and shower cabin, which can accommodate up to seven people. A skipper is generally a good idea as he can point out landmarks such as Cape Grget, the uninhabited islet of Veli Školj and the other smaller outcrops that dot this part of the Adriatic. You may also wish to plot up a less crowded beach, either towards Vrsar or Zelena in the opposite direction.

→ istra-nautika.com

**14 Watch art in action**

Every year, in the abandoned quarry of Montraker outside Vrsar, a unique arts project takes place. The Montraker International Sculpture School involves a gathering of students whose task is to transform lumps of stone into finely crafted works of art. In order to do this, they are instructed by tutors over the course of these three weeks in September. Members of the public can go and watch the sculptors in action, and see the progress they make. The best creations, including ones from the current summer batch, are then placed in prominent places around Vrsar, parks, squares and on the waterfront.

→ montraker.hr



**15 Tuck into steak on a picturesque terrace**

Under the ownership of Mario Fabrisa for the last 25 years, the Histria Da Mario on the main road that skirts Funtana shows the extent of Fabrisa's experience in the hospitality trade. A veteran of the Plava Laguna group in Poreč, Fabrisa opened this restaurant where a string of others now operates, so intense competition encourages him to push the envelope as far as the menu is concerned. Steak Motovun-style with truffles, rabbit stew, spicy Istrian lasagne and, for vegetarians, mushroom lasagne, all differ from standard offerings. Platters might be the way to go, either for seafood or meat, carnivores particularly well catered for here. Quality Istrian wine, a Kozlović from Buje, say, may accompany. All takes place on an expansive, leafy terrace, with nearly three times more space than the comfortable interior put to good use if the evening turns chilly.

→ Istarska 22, Funtana (052 445 393, histria-damario.hr)

**16 Knock back cocktails at Papillon**

It may not be on the busy Vrsar waterfront but the trek up to Papillon, on the outskirts of the historic centre, is well worth the bother. Expertly mixed drinks are served with a smile and a little bowl of nibbles, as if due reward for making the effort up here. All the standards are here, mojitos, martinis and more, complemented by a decent range of Istrian wines and well chosen background music. There's plenty of terrace space and if it turns a little chilly later, a nice buzz around the bar inside.

→ Porečka 2, Vrsar (091 519 8404)

**17 Start the day with quality coffee**

The best spot for coffee in Vrsar, L'Angeliq was forced to close for the 2018 season but is expected to be back in business by 2019. Opened in 2007, L'Angeliq embodies a decade of dedication on the part of owner Tomislav Maslač, who sources its coffee beans, organic Arabica,

directly from farms in Bolivia, the Galapagos and Ethiopia. Guests have a choice of two terraces, one by the front door, the other behind the belltower, while inside display the Gallic flair suggested by the venue name: a swirl of marble, a little abstract painting and delicious home-made cakes displayed under the glass. As the day wears on, cocktails, tap beers and local wines come into play.

→ Orlandova 47, Vrsar (098 957 0352, facebook.com/LAngeliq-cafe-149085271805791)

**18 Climb into an original MiG supersonic jet fighter**

Between Vrsar and the Limski Canal, a collection featuring a Soviet MiG 21 jet fighter, an Antonov 2 and several Cessnas await with open cockpits on field by a small local airport. The Aeropark Vrsar allows visitors to clamber in and sit in the pilot's seat, with all the original instruments in the cabin. A guided tour in English of the hangar points out various military artefacts once used in aerial conflict, while a memorial

honours the two Croatian airmen killed when Vrsar airport was hit by cluster bombs in 1991. The Aeropark operates from May to October, with group visits in winter, and also offers panoramic flights over Istria and skydiving on certain days.

→ 098 233 676, aeroparkvrsar.blogspot.com

**19 Devour Vrsar's finest pizza**

Vrsar has plenty of pizzerias to choose from but relaxed, family-run Fančita is regularly voted one of the top in Istria. Everyone's favourites are made with fresh ingredients and served in the main dining space of a large, roofed terrace that makes up for its lack of sea views. Inside the traditional wood-fired oven is the main draw. There's also a full menu featuring plenty of traditional Istrian dishes plus a good local wine list.

→ Dalmatinska 38, Vrsar (052 441 019, facebook.com/fancitavrsar)

**20 Discover an exceptional konoba**

The word konoba, loosely translated as 'tavern', conjures up images of a homely, family-run eatery, all rustic stone walls and wooden-beam ceilings, where a tourist-friendly menu plays safe and portions are huge. Just outside Funtana, on the main road to the Limski Canal, Konoba Bare ticks the boxes related to décor and ambience but where the food is concerned, it's a completely different level. Yes, you'll usually still find Istrian boškarin beef, fish soup and fuži pasta twists with scampi and truffles, but the kitchen does a whole lot more with lamb, tuna and sea bass than many of its more mainstream counterparts would elsewhere around Istria. Carpaccios, imaginative mare e monti pairings and ragus are created, embellished with spectacular foams and sauces, and presented with due care on a stark white plate. Equally, desserts lend a 21st-century twist to tradition while wine is a strong suit, top whites and a fine selection of local Terans available. To round it off, prices have been kept within more than reasonable limits.

→ Kamenarija 4, Funtana (052 445 193, facebook.com/BareKonoba)



Oysters

## BEST OF THE REST

### Konoba Kod Luce

This superior, contemporary kono-basits on the outskirts of Vrsar's historic centre and within a short walk of the bar-lined boardwalk. It's the kind of place where they not only handle Istrian classics with reverence, but introduce a new fish menu featuring Adriatic tuna with Dalmatian culinary garniture, and a new meat menu showcasing succulent veal carpaccio on a bed of young rocket. A romantic atmosphere does the rest.

→ Dalmatinska ulica 18 (091 957 3621)

### Orlandin

Offering a slow food approach where fast food is the norm, ie the Montraker waterfront at the northern tip of the Vrsar headland, Orlandin can deliver a quality burger to children rushing in from the beach, as well as a perfectly grilled sea bass or steak with all the trimming and accompaniments, for a couple spending a lazy day on the coast. It operates as a bar too, the cocktail selection including a justifiably named Orlandin Finisher with a vodka, whisky and rum base. All kinds of pancakes, desserts and ice cream also feature.

→ Montraker (091 144 1409, orlandin.eu)

### Ristorante il Tricolore

Italians write home about this quality pizzeria and trattoria, so this really is a stand-out option if you're after top-notch pasta or pizza dishes. Desserts are another speciality, authentic cannoli siciliani, closely aligned with other Calabrian favourites at certain times of the year. Like the fare itself, the surroundings are simple but well conceived, a stand-alone stone house, bare brick and wood inside. All in all, a world away from the tourist-focused eateries lining the waterfront some 200 metres from here.

→ Ulica Rade Končara 78 (095 285 8555)

### Sport Bar Grill Vala

The Vala is a seafront favourite, an unpretentious but professional eatery where you can sate your appetite after a day's bathing with a plate of squid, čevapi rissoles in flatbread or grilled fish. It's also a pub, with pool tables lining one side of an expansive covered terrace, with smaller tables right over the waterfront

for that winning sunset beer. There's occasional live music at weekends and big games screened when it matters.

→ Gradska plaža, Orsera (091 909 7878, facebook.com/SportbarVala)

### Vinoteka Velum

A wine bar crossed with a café, the Velum has the chops to stock shelf after shelf of quality Istrian labels, but with no airs, graces or pretensions. You can pair your glass – most reds, whites and rosés can be ordered by the glass – with a platter of local prosciutto, sausage, cheese and olives or, given its early opening and waterfront setting, treat yourself to a quality coffee and waffle. There are craft beers, too, most notably the phenomenally successful San Servolo from Bujie.

→ Obala Maršala Tita 1A (095 915 8868)

## BEACHES

Along with creating a summer's worth of tourist-friendly events,

Vrsar has improved the condition and facilities of its waterfront, starting with the City Beach close to the Old Town, now equipped with a children's playpark, beach bars, sports courts and a lift for the disabled. The beach itself is a mix of concrete, rocks and pebbles.

Close by, Belvedere is a Blue Flag beach lined with sunloungers and pedalos for hire, backdropped by an expanse of greenery as well kept as the beach itself. All is geared towards a hassle-free family day out, including the restaurant alongside. You can also take a ride out on the semi-submarine, whose station is parked here.

On the other side of the marina, Montraker is lined with spots where you can negotiate the rocks into the sea – wear sandals or flip-flops. Here the Montraker Water Sports Center rents out jet skis, canoes, SUP boards, inflatables and all kinds of boats. You'll also find the Orlandin eatery and Casanova Beach Bar. A little further round, Orsera is another popular bathing spot, a boardwalk with a

few sunshades, steps down into the sea and the Vala grill bar nearby.

Further north, towards Funtana, Valkenela is an extremely popular public beach of mainly smooth pebbles, close to the campsite of the same name with a large pool complex. Funtana itself has its own public beach, more a rocky cove with steps leading down into the clear water, overlooking the islet of Školjić.

For island hopping with beach fun, Sveti Juraj close to Vrsar has its own swimming spots dotted around the coast – a modest fee should persuade a local fisherman to transport you over the short distance from town.

Finally, Vrsar got its somewhat racy reputation partly thanks to Casanova's visits nearly 300 years ago, partly thanks to Koversada, Croatia's first naturist beach, now a whole resort complex of sports, games and shops. Of the five kilometres of beach, close to the entrance to the Limski Canal, not all is naturist – there's also a sandy stretch, Blue Flag in category.



# Vrsar

Vrsar enchants its visitors with an authentic romantic atmosphere of an ancient fishermen's village and with unique nature. Source of inspiration for artists, beloved spot of the famous Casanova – Vrsar is pure inspiration.



**VRSAR**  
inspires

Vrsar Tourist Board

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info@infovrsar.com

# Everything you need to know about Vrsar

Get to know the picturesque waterside town of Vrsar.

**VRSAR IS AN ATTRACTIVE** Istrian town with an interesting history and rich traditions. It is located on the western coast of Istria, near the Lim Bay. This little fishing village has a special beauty and charm, which has long inspired artists and attracts many tourists. Dating back to the Middle Ages, Vrsar runs up the hillside directly from the sea. Because of this, numerous villas were built in the old town centre, offering a unique view of the nearby archipelago of 18 islands and islets.

This romantic town is still tied in with the visits of legendary adventurer Giacomo Casanova, who described it as a place of good wine and beautiful women. The historical connection between Casanova and Vrsar lives on in the costumed event Casanovatour, which is offered to visitors during the summer months, and takes place on the slopes towards the Old Town and picturesque villas.

The community has also long been associated with fishing, so the connection of locals with the sea is everywhere.

Surrounded by vineyards and olive groves, Vrsar is home to many local producers who offer excellent wines and homemade olive oils.

The smells and tastes of local cuisine are recognisably Istrian. Fish and seafood, as well as traditional meat and pasta dishes, are offered in lovely waterfront restaurants or in cosy taverns in the surrounding villages.

Vrsar and its surroundings offer a multitude of opportunities for active holidays, for hiking, cycling, swimming, diving and parachuting.

Long promenades along the sea beckon for relaxing walks or recreational runs, and miles of cycling trails for exciting rides on two wheels. There is a particularly attractive trail through the centuries-old forest of Konti, which leads all the way to the village of Kloštar and the abandoned monastery of St Michael. In Vrsar, you can also go for a diving adventure, exploring caves, paddling or rock climbing along the Lim Bay.

Vrsar offers visitors numerous events



throughout the year, including festivals of gastronomy, entertainment and tradition, music and culture. There are also numerous sporting events, live concerts and intimate locations in the Old Town, and festivals of classical music in Vrsar churches.

Vrsar is a place of pleasure for those who want to relax in the crystal-clear sea and in pristine nature, explore historical treasures, take part in interesting and entertaining festivals, or enjoy an active vacation.

Vrsar is a place that inspires.

## EVENTS IN 2019

Fishermen's Festival – April to September  
Old Fair under a Castle – June & September  
Festival of Sea and Guitars, Vrsar Serenade,  
Concerts in the Church – June to September  
Casanovatour – May to September  
Limes Bike Tour – May  
Ocean Lava Triathlon – October  
Lim Bay Challenge – May & December  
For all details about events: [www.infovrsar.com](http://www.infovrsar.com)



## SPOTLIGHT ON VRSAR'S WATERFRONT

The pretty waterfront of Vrsar has been inhabited since before Roman times. Surrounded by an archipelago of 18 uninhabited islands, the coastline was once dotted with little fishing boats, with stone quarries around the Montraker peninsula.

**TODAY**, the luxury marina here is lined with sleek white boats while the Montraker quarry has long been abandoned – but taken over every summer by the **Montraker International Sculpture School**. Taking advantage of the same local stone that attracted the Romans and Venetians to dig here for centuries, students of art academies from Croatia, Slovenia and Italy come here with their mentors for three weeks in September to fashion pieces of art that are later placed in prominent spots around Vrsar, parks, squares and along the waterfront. Members of the public can go and see the sculptors in action – perhaps as locals would have done when the likes of famed Renaissance sculptor Antonio Rizzo carved here in the late 1400s.

The waterfront promenade, or lungomare, runs almost without interruption from the popular public beach at Valkanela – with

child-friendly climbing features bobbing in the water – all the way down to Koversada. There, south of Vrsar, the beach and campsite remain the domain of naturists, who have been flocking here since Koversada became the first nudist camp behind the Iron Curtain in 1961. These days, accommodation includes four-star apartments as well as modern camping facilities.

Vrsar's other claim to fame is its connection to **Casanova**, the amorous Italian adventurer. According to his memoirs, he docked here twice in the 1740s, the second time as a soldier – although in his writings, he complains about the rather straightlaced society he found here. For generations, the bishops of Poreč would have summerhouses here in Vrsar, the rather grand properties you can still see if you explore the twisting medieval streets that rise up behind the seafront, creating a picturesque panorama

topped by the bell tower of **St Martin's Church**.

Casanova, meanwhile, is still celebrated on the seafront and around Vrsar's historic centre. Starting from the waterfront, visitors can take the interactive **Casanova tour** that takes in lesser-known nooks and crannies of the Old Town.

Alternatively, you can hop over to the nearest, mainly uninhabited island of **Sveti Juraj** – either rent from one of the many motor-boat outlets around the Vrsar marina or have a local sailor take you across for a nominal fee. Site of another quarry that would have attracted many Venetian sculptors 500 or more years ago, Sveti Juraj is centrepieced by the renovated **Church of St George**, the original built in the earliest days of Croatian culture.

Montraker International Sculpture School  
[www.infovrsar.com](http://www.infovrsar.com)  
→ Koversada ([www.maistracamping.com](http://www.maistracamping.com))

# Poreč Top 20

Poreč is a popular resort with Byzantine treasures and scores of restaurants, cafés and package hotels.

**HALFWAY** between Rovinj and Novigrad on Istria's busy west coast, Poreč has long been given over to tourism, even before Croatia's current boom. This doesn't mean that this former Roman colony doesn't have a history. Known to Italians – and the rest of the world until 1947 – as Parenzo, Poreč contains the Euphrasian Basilica, a 6th-century wonder of Byzantine architecture. The once uniform hotel stock has improved no end, though tourists strolling along focal historic Decumanus will still be pestered by restaurant barkers.

the showcase square when the Emperor Augustus made this former fortified military camp a city in the first century AD. At that time, two temples stood here, one dedicated to Mars, the other to Neptune. Without the expanse or detail of the Roman forum in Pula, Trg Marafor requires a little imagination to conjure up images of toga-clad citizens strolling around it, chatting – the former temples are piles of undocumented rubble, with stubs of columns scattered around. The unkempt, balding grass on which they sit hardly adds to the experience. But, taken together with ever lively Decumanus, Trg Marafor does give an idea of the lay-out of this seafaring settlement 2,000 years ago, and could probably do with some kind of visitor-friendly artist's impression or annotated diagram.

**3 Enjoy a quality meat-free meal** That rarity of rarities, a decent vegetarian (and vegan) restaurant deep in tourist central, Bistro Artha makes best use of its location – close to Poreč city market. The menu has plenty of options without forcing you to resort to pizza, and whatever you choose – pasta with truffles in a creamy sauce, say – you can accompany it with a tasty, fresh salad. The desserts are top-quality too, and a handy carrot to have if you're persuading the kids not to have hamburgers or chicken for once. Management puts a lot of love into the place, and it shows. Hibernates from December until March.  
→ Jože Šurana 10 (052 435 495, facebook.com/bistroartha)

**2 Stroll around a Roman forum** At the head of Decumanus, the main Roman road that bisects the outcrop of land that holds Poreč, Trg Marafor was



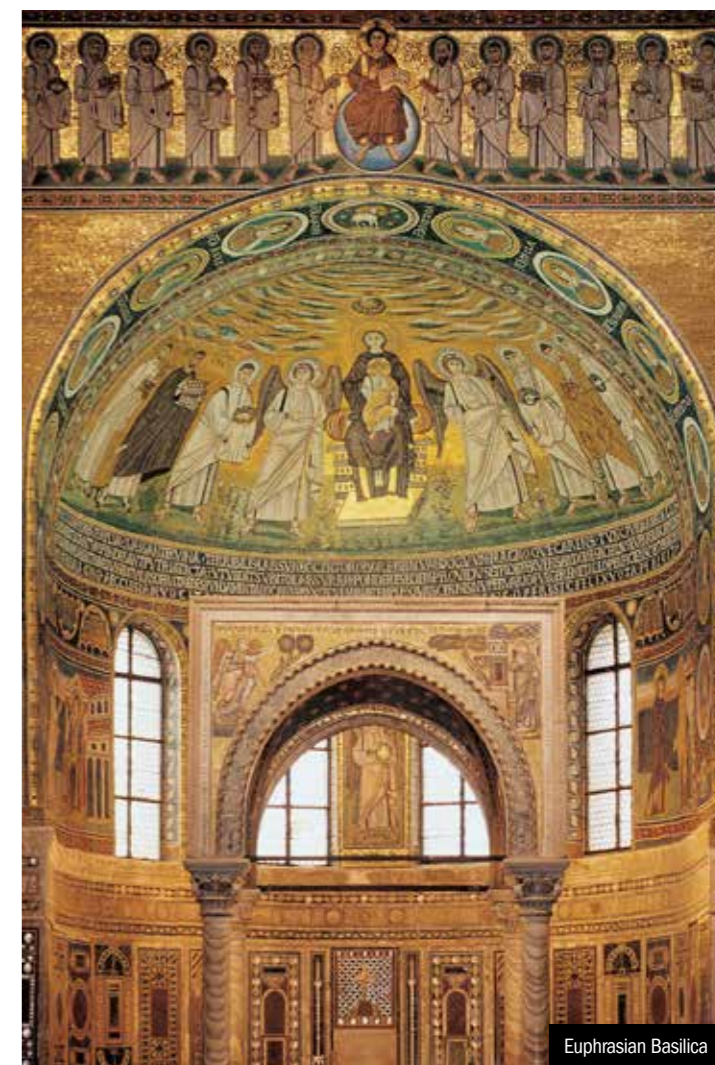
Divino

**4 Splash about at Croatia's largest water park** With 13 waterslides, including the Looping Rocket, the Space Boat and the Magicone, two large pools, one with a half-hourly wave feature, and half a kilometre of Lazy River, Aqua Colors Poreč offers a fun, family-friendly day out close to the Zelena tourist complex outside town. To one side are a children's playground with climbing frames, beach volleyball and another outdoor sports court, with competitions held at various points of the summer. Grown-ups can also order an on-site, whole-body massage. Opened in 2016,

Aqua Colors is still finding its way in terms of other entertainment – an Animation Corner has been set up on the other side of the complex from the Sports Zone. Admission is structured in whole-day, six-hour and 210-minute price bands.  
→ Molindrio 10 (052 219 671, aquacolors.eu)

**5 Marvel at Byzantine architecture** No other man-made sight in Croatia is as stunning as the Euphrasian Basilica by the northern shore of the Poreč peninsula. It was here that the first Christians in the area worshipped – several places

of worship, and a Roman villa, were built here before Bishop Euphrasius himself got to work in the mid 500s AD. The complex is quite extensive and you'll need at least a couple of hours to explore it, taking in the baptistry, the bell tower and what's left of the Bishop's Palace from where Euphrasius directed operations. And there's little doubt this is his work, the bishop having left his likenesses and inscriptions all over the strikingly bright mosaics around the Basilica. Glittering gold colouring and sparkling semi-precious gems all feature amid the sumptuous mosaics, a pristine example of Early Byzantine architecture. Construction is said to have taken ten years, though various elements, such as the 13th-century cimborium based on St Mark's in Venice, were added much later.  
→ Eufrazijeva 22 (052 431 635, zupaporec.com/euphrasian-basilica.html)



Euphrasian Basilica



Ski Lift

## 6 Tuck into traditional family food

In a town developed for package tourism during the 1970s and 1980s, Hrast has been an independent and homely exception to menus with numbered photographs and one-time visits. Unveiled in 1971, its terrace with a perfect view of the historic centre of Poreč just around the bay, Hrast insists on producing as much as possible in-house. This includes the Istrian fuži pasta twists, the njoki dumplings, the cheese ravioli and even the bread you'll be served – not to mention the muscat wine and olive-oil cake, arancini riceballs and shrimp soup. Don't miss out, either, on the prawns in brandy or fish al forno. There's meat too – the veal medallions in red-wine sauce is recommended. Oh, and course, it's all family-run.

→ Nikole Tesle 13 (052 433 797, <http://restoran-hrast.com>)

## 7 Admire art in a Gothic palace

Right on Decumanus, on a prominent corner with Cardo Maximus, the Zuccato Palace retains its historic Gothic exterior, partly made from stone all the way from Korčula. The interior has been transformed into the Zuccato Gallery, the most radical and active on the local arts scene. Recent exhibitions have featured the works of Petra Grozaj, whose paintings have been shown in Zagreb, Berlin, Graz and Venice, and conceptual artist Radomir Damjanović Damnjan, whose solo shows across Europe date back to 1958.

→ Cardo Maximus (052 887 210)

## 8 Try then buy Istrian wines

Close to the Euphrasian Basilica on Eufrazijeva ulica, Bacchus is wine bar, eaterie and delicatessen all in one, all purveying authentic but affordable Istrian products. Malvazija, muškát and red refošk are sold by the glass, allowing you to sit outside on the rustic terrace on a pretty open courtyard. Family-made rakija grappas – honey-flavoured medica, biska from mistletoe and fig-based smokva – may also be sampled. Istrian platters of smoked hams, cheeses and olives can be shared among two or four people, and there are sardine, seafood and truffle versions too.

→ Eufrazijeva 10 (091 404 0051, [bacchus-porec.hr](http://bacchus-porec.hr))

## 9 Watch art in action

Every year, in the abandoned quarry of Montraker outside Vrsar, close to Poreč, a unique arts project takes place. The Montraker International Sculpture School involves a gathering of students whose task is to transform lumps of stone into finely crafted works of art. In order to do this, they are instructed by tutors over the course of these three weeks in September. Members of the public can go and watch the sculptors in action, and see the progress they make. The best creations, including ones from the current summer batch, are then placed in prominent places around Vrsar, parks, squares and on the waterfront.

## 10 Go waterskiing

Opened with a live show by Elvis Jackson in 2010, the Ski Lift Poreč near the Zelena Laguna holiday camp and Byblos nightclub is a station that provides access to a cable 650 metres in length. Several kinds of waterborne activities can be tried here, including wakeboarding and mono-ski slalom. Beginners can pay by the hour for instruction and practice, with helmet and equipment thrown in for a few extra kunas. The Ski Lift station doubles up as a summer attraction even for those not taking part, as its bar and restaurant are popular hangouts. There's also beach volleyball, sand football and various other land-based games alongside. Ski Lift Poreč stays open from Easter to the middle of November.

→ Zelena Laguna (091 474 7714, [skiliftporec.com](http://skiliftporec.com))

## 11 Take in local history along Decumanus

As arrow straight as can be, as well as narrow and high-sided for much of its length the Roman thoroughfare of Decumanus is the spine of Poreč, packed to the gills in summer. Laid out east-west under Emperor Augustus in the first century AD, Decumanus runs from modern Trg Slobode to the former Roman forum of Trg Marafor, a distance of some 350-400 metres. As well as far too many ice-cream parlours and souvenir shops, Decumanus is dotted with several historical curiosities, starting with medieval Peterokutna kula and



Decumanus

its tower-top restaurant. Further along is the City Museum, with the atmospheric courtyard bar Lapidarium alongside. You then hit the major crossroads of Cardo Maximus, the north-south Roman thoroughfare, with the Gothic-tinged Zuccato Palace gallery on the corner, before passing the

stand-alone Romanesque House, mainly two-storey structure dating back to the 1200s. By now, the landscape is more open, with occasional green spaces either side and pretty Baroque buildings more prominent, former homes of Venetian and Habsburg merchants. At the end, Trg Marafor is somewhat

underwhelming, its twin Roman temples little but ruins, though you can walk round them for a full view of the Adriatic seafloor.

## 12 Polish off prime pljukanci

Thin, hand-rolled pasta perfect for tomato and

seafood sauces, this preferred staple of Istria's northern coastline is best sampled at L'Insolito. A café opened by Andrea Darer in 2009, this terrace spot on a main square in central Poreč has since expanded into a full-blown restaurant where the speciality is pljukanci served with truffles and top-quality Istrian prosciutto, pršut. It's also great for pizza, the 50 seats outdoors ideal for the family or a group of travelling companions to share round the slices in the sunshine.

→ Narodni trg 3 (095 555 5535)

## 13 Dive from Brulo to Zontulo

In operation since the early 2000s, the Diving Centre Poreč offers both instruction and guided dives to sites around the area, as far as the Limski kanal and Rovinj. Beginners can start with a basic two-hour scuba session, culminating in a first sea dive, while those with slightly more experience can search for starfish and seafish in the shallow waters of Uvala Brulo on the doorstep. More seasoned divers then explore Žontulo, Frižital reef and around Sveti Nikola island. Diving Centre Poreč holds a special permit from the Croatian Ministry



Poreč Diving Center



## Poreč Top 20

of Culture, meaning that it can take the most experienced divers to the wreck of the Coriolanus, a Royal Navy trawler that sank with 40 men on 5th May 1945, two days before the German surrender was signed.  
→ Brulo 4 (052 433 606, divingcenter-porec.com)

### 14 Boogie on the beach

If not the best nightspot in Poreč then certainly the most accessible and affordable, Saint and Sinner is both downtown club

and beachfront lounge bar. The seafront venue down by the Zelena Laguna complex is a summer favourite, fun and unpretentious. You'll find name DJs elsewhere, here is just about dancing to mainstream tunes with a whole bunch of like-minded holiday-makers. There's little by way of heavy security and the cocktail makers are as entertaining as the DJs, spinning drinks and rapping with the customers. Relaxation is the name of the game here, with a

bit of wild partying thrown in for good measure.  
→ Obala Maršala Tita 12 (099 221 1811, facebook.com/saintsinnerporec)

### 15 Cycle the Parenzana

Built in 1902, left to rust after 1935, the Parenzana was a narrow-gauge rail that ran from Trieste, winding through the bucolic Istrian interior before terminating at Poreč. In those days, this was all Italy and Poreč was Parenzo, hence the name. Running for over 60

kilometres, it has gradually been revived, section by section, by local outdoor enthusiasts. Mostly, though, the Parenzana is patronised by cyclists and hikers, and regularly facilitated with improvements such as maps, benches, bike racks and service stations equipped with air pumps and repair kits. In September, it stages the three-day MTB Parenzana race, one of many events in a busy cycling calendar.  
→ parenzana.net

### 16 Explore underground lakes

Halfway from Poreč to Višnjan, the Baredine Cave has been a major tourist attraction since opening to the public in 1995. Tours are advertised all over Poreč. You can travel here independently – there's a car park right outside – but all visits are guided ones, and take place every 30 minutes, in English among other languages. You're first led along a pathway 300 metres long before reaching 60 metres deep, where you find underground lakes and five otherworldly chambers filled with ancient stalactites and stalagmites. In the waters you should see the strange-looking olm, or European cave salamander, blind and pink, hence its alternative name of the human fish in Croatian. Given its appearance and habitat – it does everything underwater – the olm has been the subject of many a local legend. Tours last 40 minutes. Wear decent shoes, hold on to the railings when negotiating slippery stairs and be prepared for a fair climb back up.

→ Nova Vas (098 224 350, baredine.com)

### 17 Find quality seafood in an alleyway tavern

You might see the sign 'Konoba Aba' if you're heading along Eufrazijeva – but only if you were looking for it. Tucked down a passageway two paces across, this traditional Croatian tavern fills its stone interior and modest slice of terrace with tables, upon which hefty portions of squid, langoustines, white fish and seafood pastas are placed. It's classic Adriatic stuff, blitva greens with almost everything – unless you're having grilled meat, in which case the chips are decent. Opt for the drinkable house wine and you won't find a much cheaper lunch in town.

→ Matka Vlačića 2 (052 438 669)



Jama Baredine

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## 18 Sip cocktails in Roman ruins

Where once Roman citizens of Parentium strolled, shot the breeze and perhaps sipped wine, today holidaymakers sit and neck cocktails. Enclosed by ancient stone walls and overhanging foliage, Comitivm provides the perfect setting for evening drinks after a hard day's sightseeing or sunbathing. In a lovely garden amid the atmospheric ruins of Trg Marafor, classic mixed drinks are served, all the cocktail favourites include flavour of the month in these parts, Aperol spritz. If there happens to be a summer shower or Bura wind, tables inside are surrounded by a decor of marble and shiny wood. All is a touch more sophisticated than most spots around Poreč, without being noticeably more expensive.

→ Decumanus 15

## 19 Take in sunset with dolphins

One of many companies who provide boat trips from Poreč, family-run Victoria Tours offers a more unique excursion. Setting off from Poreč harbour at 6pm most evenings, Captain Bruno steers the Victoria towards Rovinj and, in particular, the mouth of the Limski kanal. Here dolphins come to feed when the shipping lanes are much quieter. Although dolphin sighting is not guaranteed, given Bruno's vast experience in these waters, it's a more than likely occurrence. The tour also takes in this part of the Istrian coast – Funtana, Vrsar and the islands off Poreč before returning to harbour for 10.30pm.

→ Obala Maršala Tita (098 535 415, victoriatours-porec.com)

## 20 Eat out close to base

Running alongside the major hub of tourist hotels north of Poreč, Špadići is where you'll find the pretty, Italianate house and terrace that contain the friendly eatery Malu Poreč. Fine seafood, perfectly grilled fish, fresh greens and welcoming staff engender return custom, the quality pizzas meaning that it's a great option for young families too. Wines and olive oils are local and well sourced, and excellent coffee finishes off a memorable meal – even occasionally a free shot of rakija.

→ Špadići 6 (091 452 2511)



Bacchus Vinoteka

## BEST OF THE REST

### Bacchus Vinoteka

A very old-school wine bar/eatery this, in the heart of the Old Town, where the quaffable malvazija and teran are provided by the Rossi winery at knockdown prices. Sustenance comes in the form of platters, the Istrian for one to three diners probably the wisest choice, though you may want to accompany it with the cheese selection, too. Geared towards tourism and most customers seem more than satisfied.

→ Eufrazijeva 10 (091 404 0051, bacchus-porec.hr)

### Epoca

Good music, friendly staff and a sociable buzz set this place apart from the other harbourside bars. Near the tip of the peninsula that holds the Old Town, at the start of the busy strip of cafés and restaurants, Epoca offers a spacious interior with circular wooden bar and sea views, with wicker chairs and wooden tables outside. Bruschetta and other light bites are on offer, as are granita, frappés and ice cream. Dancing might break out in the

evening, though the crowd you'll be schmoozing with will be mostly fellow travellers. Good cocktails.

→ Obala Maršala Tita 24 (098 276 167, epoca.hr)

### Gostionica Tri Bačve

They've been serving shellfish to local regulars and tourists here for years, the catch brought in by the fishermen in the family then sizzled in the pan and drizzled with oil. There's fish too, select the one you want from the display platter, and a limited choice of meat – but mostly you're here for the clams, scallops, mussels and scampi. All very no-nonsense and none the worse for it.

→ Ulica Mattea Benussia 8 (052 452 522, facebook.com/Tribacve)

### Konoba Daniela

Some five kilometres outside Poreč, the Daniela provides a classic rustic Istrian experience, its arcaded terrace full of birdsong in spring, its fireplace warming in winter. Here, peka dishes are the way to go – phone ahead to order succulent octopus or meat, slow-cooked for several hours under hot coals. Most dishes are locally sourced, using

fresh, seasonal ingredients. It's a guesthouse, too, so the welcome is particularly warm, with affordable rooms available.

→ Veleniki 15A (052 460 519, konobadaniela.com)

### Peterokutna kula

Calling itself 'The Key to Poreč', Peterokutna kula stands at the gateway to the Old Town, a pentagonal tower built in 1447 with a handful of restaurant tables at the top. Most of its many seats are inside, a pleasantly restored space, though the panoramic ones are at a premium in high season and worth booking around the hour of sunset. The menu does nothing adventurous but shouldn't disappoint either, with classic Istrian dishes brought to the fore, many involving truffles. This might be the place to opt for steak rather than fish, which is probably better executed elsewhere.

→ Decumanus 1 (098 977 9222, kula-porec.com.hr)

### Pizzeria Nono

There are enough pizzerias in Poreč so the Nono knows what

it takes to persuade diners back: fresh toppings, large helpings and fair prices. With most of the 30-strong pizza selection in the 60kn range, you really can't go wrong – that quality prosciutto on the Istriana variety will cost you a few kunas more. Note that 'big' here means big – bring an appetite or order the smaller version at 45-50kn. Very family-friendly, the experienced waitstaff adept at dealing with children.

→ Zagrebačka 4 (052 453 088)

### Pub Spacio

Prime nightspot in the Zelena Laguna holiday complex, the Spacio provides shots and cocktails to a very much up-for-it young party crowd, with a little live music thrown in. DJs keep the dancefloor packed while beer served in three-litre measures keep the lads happy. An easy stagger from at least half-a-dozen hotels.

→ Zelena Laguna 14 (052 451 789, facebook.com/pubspacio)

### Restaurant Spinnaker

Flagship restaurant of the four-star Valamar Riviera Hotel, the Spinnaker is a notch above in every sense: decor, presentation, location, service and locally sourced ingredients from sea and land. It's one of those places where the waiter explains



Restaurant Sv Nikola

each dish to the diner, without being obtrusive about it – 'here's your lamb with tomato concasse, asparagus and garlic cream, enjoy!' – and the sea bass is deftly placed before you as a work of art. Quality wines to suit the surroundings.

→ Obala Maršala Tita 15 (052 400 800, valamar.com/en/porec/restaurant-spinnaker)

### Sv Nikola

For top-quality fish with a sea view, you probably can't top Sv Nikola – but you'll also be paying close to top dollar. The fillet here comes in a sublime scampi-and-scallop sauce, the speciality fish panna cotta an outstanding appetiser. If you're taking the meat route, then the house-style steak should be memorable, the Cardo Maximus pork with just the right flavouring of Mediterranean herbs. Soups are another strong

point, cream of scampi vellutata and the Motovun forest with truffles and mushrooms. Service is impeccable.

→ Obala Maršala Tita 23 (052 423 018, svnikola.com)

### Wine Corner

Opened on the eve of the summer season in 2015, Wine Corner strikes a lovely balance between bar with quality Istrian reds and whites, and eatery purveying more than just nibbles. Much more than just nibbles, in fact – you can go the whole hog and order up a plate of boškarin ox, but most are happy to go with a platter of prosciutto and locally sourced cheese and soak in the atmosphere of a quaint side-street in the Old Town. Owner Toni makes everyone welcome – many here are returning customers.

→ Eufrazijeva 3 (098 163 2227)



Sv. Nikola Island



## BEACHES

Beaches are what Poreč is all about. This is a holiday resort for holiday-makers, so you can rent jet skis, go wakeboarding, take a banana ride or let the kids loose on inflatables.

The main resort is Zelena Laguna south of Poreč, connected by a regular boat service in high season. Here, some ten kilometres of coast are given over to pleasure – here's where you find the Ski Lift Poreč centre for wakeboarding, all kinds of rides and rentals, courts for beach volleyball and tennis, and plenty of shops and eateries close at hand. The beaches here tend to be man-made of pebbles or concrete.

While busy – ten hotels and campsites are dotted all around – Zelena Laguna is expansive enough so that it's rarely crowded in one particular spot.

For a beach closer to town, but still with enough amenities to keep you occupied, Brulo sits halfway between Zelena Laguna and the centre of Poreč. Also close to several hotels, it comprises waterfront of pebbles and rocks (wear flip-flops) with plenty of showers and changing stands, pine trees alongside for shade. The kids can bounce about on inflatables or there are ping-pong tables and mini golf. Note also the Diving Center Poreč here, with scuba courses for beginners.

The few bathing areas in town itself attract a number of local regulars, happy to throw their towel down on a stretch of concrete and relax in the sun for a while.

A 15-minute walk north of town, also linked by a tourist train in summer, Pical is the other major beach in the vicinity, its smooth pebbles and play areas making it child-friendly. Surrounded by beach bars, Pical is also where you find a jet-ski centre with flyboarding, SUP and banana boats.



# Dive into summer

Make the most of Poreč in summer with our outdoor essentials.

**POREČ IS** a town developed for tourism. Istria doesn't have any other resort like it, with tens of thousands flooding into the scores of hotels that do a roaring trade all summer. Many spend most of their days on the beach, perhaps wandering around the Old Town and visiting the stand-out sight, the Euphrasian Basilica.

But there's so much more to do in Poreč, particularly if you feel like getting active, individually, as a couple or as a group.

Your first port of call should be Ski Lift Poreč, near the Zelena Laguna holiday camp. Open from Easter to the middle of November, Ski Lift Poreč is essentially an active recreation station built around a 650-metre-long cableway

that allows visitors to water-ski, wakeboard, kneeboard, trick-ski and, making use of the slalom trail, mono ski. Those just starting out can take advantage of the instruction on offer, and helmets and other equipment are provided for a nominal fee. Around the station, you can make a day or weekend of it with beach volleyball, football and the tennis courts ranged around the water.

Staying in the water, and close to the Zelena Laguna resort, Aqua Colors Poreč is where the whole family can throw themselves down a whole kilometre of waterslides, 13 different ones in total. Space Boat, Black Hole, Magicone and Family Rafting, they're all here, for all ages

and sizes. For something more relaxing, the two of you can glide down half-a-kilometre of Lazy River in a two-person rubber ring or let the water bounce you around in the large wave pool. The kids can also get active up the Rope Pyramid climbing frame, around the outdoor safe-play attractions or join in a game of beach volleyball with the grown-ups.

Baredine, between Poreč to Višnjan, provides an easy, entertaining introduction to caving. With many tours offered around Poreč, you can join a guided tour in English to negotiate a pathway that takes you down to a depth of 60 metres. Here, amid underground lakes, the blind salamander or olm lives up to 60 years

without ever seeing light of day. Tours last 40 minutes and involve a strenuous climb back to the surface – wear suitable footwear.

There's plenty of sporting activity above ground, too. Cyclists and hikers can follow the Parenzana, a Habsburg-era narrow-gauge rail, left abandoned and rediscovered in recent years. Those on two wheels or two legs can pick up the track at certain sections, following a map and taking advantage of the occasional picturesque bench stop to take in the bucolic Istrian panorama.

Of course you don't have to leave Poreč at all, if you don't want. There is plenty to see and do within the city's boundaries. Take a relaxed lunch at one of the cafes within the pedestrianised Old Town, sauntering along the 3,000-year-old stone-paved thoroughfare of Decumanus afterwards. Decumanus, the square Trg Marafor, and the ruins of the temples of Neptune and Mars, are delightful evidence of Roman occupation that you can take in, but you can also see 15th-century Gothic villas along the route too.

For those looking to learn even more about the history of the city, Poreč's sixth-century Euphrasian Basilica is a must-visit. It is not only Croatia's key surviving example of Byzantine art, it is by far the country's most beautiful. The Basilica was built by Bishop Euphrasius and dedicated to Saint Mauro and the Virgin Mary. It was granted UNESCO status in 1997. Ornate mosaics impressively line some walls and you can wander around several parts of the complex, including the belfry of the neighbouring Bishop's Palace, from where you'll have a great view of the city and sea.

Walking down by the sea itself is a wonderful way to enjoy Poreč and also take in some local history. The city's harbour contains reminders of Venetians rule, which ended only in the 18th century, passing on first into the hands of Napoleon and then the Habsburgs. The Venetians built a town wall which stretched from the harbourside Round Tower to the Pentagonal Tower.

A short drive outside of the city takes you to the small village of Višnjan. The tiny place holds global significance thanks to the Višnjan observatory. Though run solely by volunteer academics and students it is responsible for more than 30% of the world's mapping of asteroids with the potential to hit Earth. A record number of such objects have been discovered here and since its parent astronomy club was founded almost half a century ago, the observatory has grown into a world-renowned education centre and added several large telescopes to their arsenal.

- Ski Lift Poreč, Zelena Laguna ([skiliftporec.com](http://skiliftporec.com))
- Aqua Colors Poreč, Molindrio 10 ([aquacolors.eu](http://aquacolors.eu))
- Diving Centre Poreč, Brulo 4 ([divingcenter-porec.com](http://divingcenter-porec.com))
- Victoria Tours, Obala Maršala Tita ([victoriatours-porec.com](http://victoriatours-porec.com))
- Baredine Cave, Nova Vas ([baredine.com](http://baredine.com))
- Parenzana ([parenzana.net](http://parenzana.net))
- Horse Centre Lanterna, Tar-Vabriga ([horse-centar.com](http://horse-centar.com))
- Go-kart race track
- Adrenalin park Sky Fox



# Motovun Top 20

Motovun is one of Istria's most beautiful and best-preserved medieval hilltop settlements.

**MOTOVUN** is one of Istria's most beautiful and best-preserved medieval hilltop settlements. It's best known for its film festival, which transforms this otherwise sleepy town into a cultural and party hub for one week every summer, a cross between Sundance and Glastonbury. Surrounded by truffle-rich forest, which provides the key ingredient for top local restaurants here and in nearby Livade, Motovun stands atop a 277-metre hill overlooking the Mirna Valley. Sunsets are spectacular, as are the views from the main bar in town, the Montona Gallery.

**1 Do the Parenžana**  
Revived in modern times as a cycling and hiking trail, the Parenžana was a narrow-gauge railway in the Habsburg era. Built in 1902, it ran from Trieste in Italy, through the Istrian interior before terminating down the coast at Poreč. After the Habsburg Empire collapsed in 1918, it was overseen by Istria's new occupiers, Italy, but fell into disrepair and was closed in 1935. Neglected for decades, it was revived section by section after Croatian independence. Now it is used for panoramic



## Motovun Top 20

**3 Take a spa break**  
Once selling itself on its location in the historic centre of Motovun and its reassuringly traditional appearance, blending in with the Italianate buildings around this pretty square, the Hotel Kaštel took the wise step of investing in a top-quality spa facility. Guests and non-guests alike can relax in a Cleopatra's bath of milk and honey, enjoy a body scrub and facial in warm lavender oil, sample wine or truffle therapy treatments or go for a classic hot-stone massage. Those are just a few of the attractions on offer – you are probably just as well opting for a detox package or spa day. There's a pool, too, with hydro jets, the outdoor section open to non-residents in summer.  
→ Trg Andrea Antico 7 (052 681 607, hotel-kastel-motovun.hr)

**4 Experience Istria's Sundance**  
The live piano that accompanied Aki Kaurismäki's silent movie Juha in August 1999 ushered in a groundbreaking annual event that has transformed this hilltop community every summer since. Back then, a few thousand gathered in a renovated theatre



Parenžana

walks and bike rides, the route taking in picturesque Motovun, Buje and Grožnjan around Istria's hilltop landscape.  
→ parenzana.net

**2 Enjoy a romantic meal**  
In the historic heart of Motovun, with an elevated terrace overlooking the rolling Istrian countryside and an interior of bare brick, candlelight and a blazing fireplace, Pod Voltom is the most prominent restaurant in town but also the most intimate. Martina and Benjamin run a tight ship, in operation since 1991, but the dining experience is friendly and relaxed. The menu is, of course, Istria-focused, truffles with many dishes, maneštra soup, fuži pasta, game and asparagus, while the wines come courtesy of Arman, Kozlović and Matošević.  
→ Trg Josefa Resselja 6 (052 681 923, facebook.com/podvoltom)



Motovun Film Festival

that had been closed for decades. Now the Motovun Film Festival attracts some 40,000 visitors, who descend upon this little town for five days every July, sleeping at a campsite set up for the event, sleeping in their own cars, sleeping wherever they fall. Star guests such as Vanessa Redgrave and Ken Russell are provided with more comfortable accommodation as some 100 films are screened – the best winning the annual Propeller award – in two indoor and two outdoor locations. The party goes on non-stop with live music and dancing, independent filmmakers mingling with producers, actors and festivalgoers.

→ [motovunfilmfestival.com](http://motovunfilmfestival.com)

## 5 Stroll in protected natural forest

Just outside Motovun, near the natural spa waters of Istarske toplice, Motovunska šuma is a small area of forest protected by Natura Histrica, the same body responsible for Brijuni National Park and Učka nature reserve. The Venetians were the first to single out this particular pocket of woodland in Istria's verdant hinterland, partly because of its particular beauty, partly because the European oaks so prevalent here provided such perfect wood for shipbuilding and wine barrels. Fed by a tributary of the Mirna, the forest here also features white poplars, hornbeam and lowland ash. From mid-summer until autumn, the best time to visit, the bright purple blossoms of clematis viticella provide vivid colour and attract hosts of swallowtail butterflies.

## 6 Sip a sundowner

Once a 'bistro' now a money-spinning 'pizzeria' the Montona Gallery hasn't really changed all that much. It's still the main bar in Motovun, the meeting place for gallery owners, expat residents, artists and artisans, a hive of lively chatter until way after midnight. For most visitors, though, the Montona Gallery means one thing: its terrace, overlooking the historic city walls and the rolling Istrian landscape beyond. Time it right, and you'll also see a bright orange sunset slowly melt below the horizon, as one glass of finest Istrian Malvasia turns into two.

→ Trg Josefa Ressler 2 (052 681 754)

## 7 Slice into Istrian ox

Now considered a rare delicacy, boškarin meat comes from the specific long-horned Istrian cattle of the same name. A beast of burden for generations, the boškarin ox was rapidly going the way of the dodo when farmers turned to motorised vehicles from the 1960s onwards. By the 1990s, there were a few hundred left in existence. Like the regional revival of the wine and olive-oil industries, so the boškarin has been enjoying a comeback, farmed for its fine meat which is now sold across Croatia. Naturally, it's best eaten in situ, such as at the restaurant of the Hotel Kaštel in the heart of Motovun. Here at the Palladio, named after the architect thought to have created Sv Stjepan church nearby, you can find starters of boškarin carpaccio or the house spread of Kris, a boškarin-truffle mix. Boškarin also shows up with home-made noodles and rocket, or as a meatloaf in the main courses. While you're here, you may as well sample some of the finest desserts in town, namely pears in teran wine or the home-made apple pie with cinnamon.

→ Trg Andrea Antico 7 (052 681 607, [hotel-kastel-motovun.hr](http://hotel-kastel-motovun.hr))

## 8 Pick up a local souvenir

Of the many little boutiques and galleries that dot Motovun's historic centre, the Etnobutiga Ča is probably the most authentic. This little store has been arranged in the same style as a 19th-century peasant home, with original furniture. Although the cupboards and chairs aren't for sale, the grappas, honeys, truffles, jams, herbs, wines and essential oils are – and are equally authentic. There are also all kinds of decorative artefacts carved from olive wood, as well as ceramics.

→ Gradizol 33 (052 681 767, [antique-motovun.com.hr](http://antique-motovun.com.hr))

## 9 Paraglide over Motovun

Starting up in May, local outdoor adventure company Paragliding Tandem Istra offer four kinds of soaring jaunts over the Motovun countryside. Standard ones take place in tandem with an experienced instructor, hence the name, but you can choose a basic-level flight of 15-20 minutes or one of around two hours. For those keen to learn more, there are courses



Truffle hunt

lasting a day or a whole week, each requiring at least two participants. → 098 922 8081, [istraparagliding.com](http://istraparagliding.com)

## 10 Walk the ancient walls

From the vantage point of the sturdy walls enclosing Motovun's historic centre, it is said that you can see all four corners of Istria. Certainly, the Venetians knew what they were doing when they built them as defensive fortifications in the late 1200s. Note the city gates as you walk alongside, created in Gothic or Renaissance styles over four centuries. With all the ramparts intact, and you still can do a complete circuit, perhaps rewarding yourself with a drink at the Caffe Bar Bistro Montona Gallery afterwards.

## 11 Sleep at a luxury family winery

Just outside Motovun at Kaldir, the Benvenuti family of Livio, Albert and Nikola grow three grape varieties, Istrian malvasia, teran and muscat, on south-facing vineyards. This sandy soil produces a honey, fruity wine, best sampled when aged in the barrel for 18 months to create Muscat or Malvasia San Salvatore. But Benvenuti is not only about wine sampling – the villa here is hired out to discerning guests, the fireplace roaring in winter, the pool surrounded by sunloungers in summer. At least half a dozen guests may stay at any one time, making this the perfect choice for a getaway celebration with friends or family, wine essential to the party, of course.

→ Kaldir 7 (052 691 322, [benvenutivina.com](http://benvenutivina.com))

## 12 Explore local history

With no city museum to speak of, Motovun hides its history in strange nooks and crannies – it's not even certain who built the main church, although an expert can quickly detect that it's Venetian. And what of the locals, who worked the land for generations, tending the hillside vineyards and hunting in the surrounding forests? The easiest way to explore local history is to take a wander around Motovun's main cemetery, set at the bottom of ulica Vladimira Gortana, named after an Istrian freedom fighter from the 1920s. Stroll around the graves, most with a portrait photograph of the occupant, and you'll soon see how so many of the local populace were of peasant stock, with Italian family names. Dates also play an important role – the greater number of Slavic names after the 1950s reflected the post-war population exchange that saw families uproot and head to Italy.

## 13 Zip around on a Vespa

One of the most romantic tours on offer in and around Motovun is a day trip on a Vespa. Zipping past olive groves and vineyards, your guide takes you along roads with the most stunning views, stopping at a local konoba for lunch and sampling truffles and wine on the way. Tours, organised by Montona, take place between April and mid October, and are open to over-18s holding a valid driver's licence.

→ 051 681 970, [montonatours.com](http://montonatours.com)



## 14 Join the ladies who lunch

Outside Motovun, off the roundabout that leads into Livade, the Konoba Dolina attracts local regulars and the elderly Italian ladies who frequent the nearby Istarske toplice spa centre. Both are drawn by the great-value, fresh, seasonal dishes: in autumn, for example, huge plates of meaty porcini mushrooms come served with olive oil. Asparagus appears in spring. Most times of the year, you'll find heavenly fuži pasta with truffles, either in a cream sauce or without. Sugary kroštule doughnuts should finish things off nicely – the elegant signore also indulge. → Gradinje 59/1, Livade (052 664 091, [konobadolina.hr](http://konobadolina.hr))

## 15 Admire Venetian architecture

Its façade dominating a busy street just off Motovun's panoramic walkway, the Parish Church of Sv Stjepan is thought to have been the work of a follower of Venetian architect Andrea Palladio, in the late 1500s or early 1600s. It was built on an older church from the early medieval era, erected perhaps as early as the 11th century. The influential Palladio, responsible for the Palladian that became popular throughout Italy and then Europe, died in 1580, but the design for this church is said to have been his creation. An unknown Venetian artist was also responsible for the painting of the Last Supper on display over the altar. The Romanesque-Gothic bell tower alongside the church dates from the 13th century.

## 16 Take the waters

At Livade alongside Motovun, Istarske toplice are thermal waters used in Roman times – coins and jewellery have been found on the site. Beside the local landmark of a 85-metre-high rock, the Spring of Sv Stjepan provides mineral-rich curative waters. Known as the Terme Santo Stefano in Habsburg times, this spa has attracted generations of locals for treatment of rheumatic and dermatological conditions. A state-run health centre in the 1970s, the site was then developed as a resort hotel and is now in private hands. All kinds of spa detox packages are now available, as well as weekend breaks and teambuilding getaways. → Sv Stjepana 60 (052 603 000, [istarske-toplice.hr](http://istarske-toplice.hr))

## 17 See what all the fuss is about

Cornering the market

in truffle dining and carving out a slice of local history at the same time, Zigante is both the most famous restaurant in the region and a significant local industry based around this forest fungus. In the late 1990s, a certain Giancarlo Zigante and his dog Diana found the largest white truffle in history, a discovery that soon led to the opening of a shop, then this restaurant, then a traditional lodging, then a large processing and canning factory. The restaurant itself remains impressive, albeit pricy, set in a beautiful house with outdoor seating. Most dishes involve black truffles, with rarer white truffles used between October and December. → Livade 7 (052 664 302, [restaurantzigante.com](http://restaurantzigante.com))

## 18 Go on a truffle hunt

The European oaks that comprise the ancient Motovun Forest are prime territory



Truffle hunt

for truffles. Every autumn, truffle hunters and their expert dogs scour the woods for these sought-after treasures, a lucrative activity if you know where to look. If you're curious to find out how it's done, you can join an experienced guide from Motovun-based firm Miro Tartufi plus dogs Bela and Nera, and find these precious funghi while exploring unspoiled greenery. Miro also runs a delicatessen in Motovun's historic centre.

→ Kanal 27 (052 681 724, [miro-tartufi.com](http://miro-tartufi.com))

## 19 Sample seasonal Istrian cuisine

First-time visitors looking to dine in Livade may head straight to the famous Zigante truffle restaurant – while Croatians and returning customers come to the Konoba Dorjana on the other side of the turning from Motovun. Also family-run, in this case the Basanežes, the Konoba Dorjana is all about pairing what's in season – wild mushrooms, asparagus, snails, truffles – with a suitable staple, polenta, pasta, and so on. The steaks sprinkled with truffles is said to be the best for miles around. The point here is that it's no fuss, no formality – a homely dining room is done out with wood, stone and black-and-white photographs, the service is just the right balance of polite yet laid-back.

→ Livade 4 (052 664 093)

## 20 See how they built the Parenzana

At this museum in Livade especially dedicated to this legendary Istrian narrow-gauge rail line, archive photographs, vintage postcards and original documentation hark back to an era when crossing this distant outpost of the Habsburg Empire was a huge adventure. Opened in 1902, linking Trieste in modern-day Italy to Poreč on the Istrian coast, the Parenzana was a feat of engineering, winding alongside thick woodland and past steep inclines. A look at the changing colours on the map here indicates the challenging terrain. Photographs depict two main types of passenger: daytrippers in Sunday finery, and locals with business to take care of, probably at the port of Trieste. The Parenzana closed down in 1935 but the route has been revived of late to cater to cyclists and hikers.

→ Livade 1 (052 644 150, [parenzana.net](http://parenzana.net))

# Grožnjan

One of Istria's most lively medieval hilltop towns, loaded with galleries and studios.



The Parish Church of sts. Vitus, Modestus and Crescentia



**GROŽNJAN IS** one of Istria's prettiest medieval hilltop towns, 228 metres (748 feet) above sea level, with spectacular views: the Adriatic to the west and the dramatic landscape of the Mirna Valley to the east. Istria is rich with these ancient, Italianate settlements.

What sets Grožnjan apart is that it feels loved, alive and cared for. With two dozen galleries and plenty of studios, it's a thriving art hub. After World War II, this part of Istria was assigned to Tito's Yugoslavia. Many emigrated to Italy. In Grožnjan only 20 souls remained. Gradually,

visiting artists began using the empty buildings as studios and by 1965 it was formally declared a 'Town of Artists'. Street signs are hand-painted ceramics, rather than state-manufactured enamel; the colours of the shutters are subtle but just right; there are stone seats for

enjoying the view; and everywhere you look, there's a gallery. There's a perfect little town square and outside the town loggia on balmy, summer evenings are recitals by operatic tenors or jazzers, performing as part of the Grožnjan Musical Summer.

## Fonticus City Gallery

This public two-floor space is a museum, an outlet for Croatian and international artists. It has a rotating agenda of shows. Also, under its purview is a collection of insignia, crests and coats of arms from German, Croatian and Slovenian nobility.

→ Trg lode 3. T (052 776 357, tz-groznjan.hr/index.php/en/kultura-i-umjetnost/gradska-galerija-fonticus).

## Bastia

Under the church tower, this large, imposing and traditional restaurant is the main place to eat in town. Fabulous, authentic local dishes include the likes of homemade sausage, rumpsteak with truffles and twisted pasta ties (fuži) with wild game. There's a little bar with a piano in the back, and a few rooms to rent.

→ Svibnja 1 (052 776 370, no website)

# Hum

The smallest town in the world, unchanged for nearly a millennium.

**ENCLOSED** by thick, medieval walls, Hum is billed as the smallest town in the world. To qualify as a bona fide town, a settlement must have a school, church, post office, town hall and pub. Squeeze in a dozen houses and that's Hum. Traditionally it's been home to just two families, while the priest is also the publican – but things are changing. As you wander round the single, circular street, be careful not to trip over any building rubble. People have cottoned on to Hum's charm and slowly the town is coming to life. As you pass through Hum's massive, metal doors you enter a cave-like antechamber hewn out of the rock. Above is the town hall. On the walls are stone tablets inscribed in ancient Glagolitic, a Slavic script for which Hum is famous. Ahead

is the main square; to the left is the ludicrously large Church of the Exalted and Blessed Virgin Mary with its magnificent crenellated belltower. The consecration chapel of Sv Jeronima in the graveyard houses 12th-century frescoes covered with Glagolitic graffiti. Left is a Lilliputian house with a picturesque loggia. A small gallery signed 'Imela' is the source of Hum's second claim to fame: biska. This is mistletoe-flavoured grappa, made from the leaves rather than the poisonous berries. It's either bright green or golden brown depending on whether fresh or dried leaves have been used.

## Humaska Konoba

The Konoba Hum (052 660 005, 11am-11pm Sat, Sun) has a covered terrace with a beautiful



view down into the valley – this is the perfect setting to share a bukaleta (drinking jug) of traditional supa. Clearly invented by a peasant with no food in the

house, this speciality consists of red wine topped off with warm, toasted bread liberally sprinkled with olive oil.

→ Hum 2, Hum (052 660 005, hum.hr)

# Novigrad & Tar-Vabriga Top 30

Located north towards Italy, Novigrad and neighbouring towns Tar and Vabriga are charming locations for a relaxing time by the sea.

**LOCATED NORTH** towards Italy, its compact centre attracting daytrippers from over the border, Novigrad is neither as posh as Rovinj nor as packed as Poreč, but that's precisely why this can be a charming location for a relaxing time by the sea. The seaward tip of its Old Town peninsula has shaded parks and a waterside walkway, behind which Novigrad finds room for a surprising number of decent bars, hotels and restaurants. Across the bay, Tar and Vabriga are neighbouring communities popular with holidaymakers.

**1 Spoil yourself for dinner** They don't cram them in at family-run Damir & Ornella. Six tables are ranged around a cosy, bare-brick interior, a comfortable setting for fish and shrimp specialties. This truly is from sea to plate, and most of what they create – and each dish is a mini-creation in its own right – is raw. Annually acknowledged as one of the finest dining destinations on the coast, Damir & Ornella is manned by the father and daughter of the same name, happy to take bookings (052 758 134) rather than disappoint.



Gallerion

## 4 Ride horses through the sea

Within easy reach of the hotels and campsites of Vabriga, the Horse Centre Lanterna caters to visitors with years of riding experience, and children who have never even seen a horse before. The younger ones start out with socialising sessions then take modest trots around the pen. Older riders follow guides through woods, meadows and olive groves, and along the seafloor. Those after a really thrilling challenge on horseback can also go in for sea riding and night riding.

→ Horse Centre Lanterna, Tar-Vabriga (horse-centar.com)

## 5 Dine on fine fish

Another culinary must in Novigrad, Konoba Čok specialises in fish and seafood, most notably sea bream, sea perch and sole, lobster, and all kinds of shellfish including oysters. All is fresh as can be and expertly prepared and tastefully presented. While other family members run the kitchen, the affable Sergio takes care of guests and the wide range of Istrian wines on offer. If one of you isn't feeling particularly fishy, then your steak will come lathered in delicious truffle sauce. A complimentary grappa usually completes an altogether satisfying dining experience.

→ Sv Antuna, Novigrad (052 757 643)

## 6 Have a family day out

A few kilometers outside Novigrad, Istralandia is a large aquapark complex with six pools, including a children's spray arena, and 15 kinds of slides.



Novigrad



Novigrad walls

Signposted on focal Velika ulica, it's set down a narrow sidestreet near the seafloor.

→ Zidine 5, Novigrad (052 758 134, damir-ornella.com)

## 2 Discover maritime history

The work of photographer/designer Sergio Gobbo, who has spent his life researching and collating material all along the Adriatic coast, Gallerion was opened by Otto van Habsburg in 2007. As the last Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary, the late archduke would have taken a keen interest in this naval museum, focused on the Austro-Hungarian

presence in the Adriatic from the time of Napoleon to the end of World War I. The two-storey display is filled with explanations of battles, model ships, uniforms and weapons. Although a private collection, this enlightening institution has links with the Croatian Military Museum in Zagreb.

→ Mlinska ulica 1, Novigrad (098 254 279, kuk-marine-museum.net)

## 3 Sample artisanal gin

Its terrace lapped by the sea, the Vitriol keeps upping the ante even though the setting sun, smooth service and quality cocktails make this the best bar

in Novigrad, hands down. The latest attraction is artisanal gin, Istria's first handmade gin, if you please, a combination of Malvazija wine, juniper berries and spices. Still trendy enough to appeal to weekenders without losing its young, lively, local character, Vitriol is also a decent daytime spot for coffee, own-recipe cakes and fruit tarts. Evening cocktail concoctions have a distinct Italian flavour (Negroni, Garibaldi). Local wines are chalked up on a board outside, beers include Kriek and Kilkenny and there are enough hot drinks to fill an entire menu.

→ Ribarnička 6, Novigrad (052 758 270, vitriolcaffe.com)

## Novigrad Top 30

Kids can try the Black Kamikaze, Family Rafting and, for toddlers, Crazy Hills. As of 2019, there will be a new feature, Space Combo, offering nearly 200 metres of space adventure in a rubberised vehicle with full visual effects. Other attractions include beach football, beach volleyball, concerts and all kinds of courses and workshops.

→ Ronki 1, Nova Vas (052 866 900, [istralandia.hr](http://istralandia.hr))

### 7 Party at the beach

Close to a complex of campsites and overlooking the sea at Mareda, just outside Novigrad, the Macumba Beach Club provides al-fresco entertainment day and night. After a morning coffee, swim and seafront fun, the grill restaurant serves up classic Balkan favourites under welcome shade. Sunbathing suits the afternoon, before early-evening cocktails and DJs take over. At some point late on, it all slowly winds down, only to start up again with a coffee and a swim the next morning.

→ Mareda, Aemonia (098 327 558, [macumba.com.hr](http://macumba.com.hr))

### 8 Feast at a flagship restaurant

Overlooking the marina that this luxury hotel serves, the Restaurant Navigare offers top-notch Istrian cuisine, prepared in an open kitchen, to guests and non-guests alike. Executive chef Zoran Martić is on a mission to prove that the gastronomy of this region can challenge that of France or Italy, and your experience here is a memorable part of that process. The à la carte menu changes with the seasons, with local hams, asparagus and truffles a key feature according to availability. Ingredients are locally sourced whenever possible – wild asparagus, mountain spinach, fennel, sage, lavender and wild thyme.

Fresh high-quality fish, and creative dishes such as sea bass carpaccio, buzara Nautica or hefty veal ispod peke are only some highlights on offer, matched with excellent reds and whites from Istria's most respected wineries.

→ Svetog Antona 15, Novigrad (052 600 473, [nauticahotels.com/gastronomy](http://nauticahotels.com/gastronomy))

### 9 Sample the goods at a boutique winery

Just past the bus station on the outskirts of town, Moreno Ivančić is a small, family-run winery where visitors may drop in to sample the goods any day of the week. No reservation is required. The small-batch reds and whites here have a slight mineral quality and may be accompanied by fine Istrian prosciutto. Also available is rakija, as the firm has also started producing its own strong, clear spirits. Everything takes place in convivial sit-down surroundings, with more structured visits, including tours of the cellar, on offer for groups of six or more.

→ Domovinskih žrtava 20, Novigrad (095 976 8006, [ivancic-winery.com](http://ivancic-winery.com))

### 10 Gaze at the heavens

A short drive from Novigrad, the modest village of Višnjan is a popular destination thanks to its world-famous observatory. Thanks to the lack of light pollution in this part of inland Istria, some 100 minor planets, two comets and more

than 1,000 asteroids have been discovered here. The observatory also lays on tours, workshops and viewing sessions on certain nights of the year, with English-language explanations provided.

→ Istarska 5, Višnjan (052 449 212, [astro.hr](http://astro.hr))

### 11 Tuck into cheap shellfish

It's shellfish all the way at Kod Stelia, an affordable local spot by the side of the road that leads out of Vabriga for the coast. Platters of scampi, plates of crab and bowls of mussels fly out of the kitchen, having been prepared with a tasty sauce, usually involving tomatoes, wine and garlic. Pasta is the most common accompaniment, or rice, plus the house white. For those after meat instead, you'll also find very good hands here.

→ Ribarska 3, Vabriga (091 251 2079, [facebook.com/kodstelia](https://facebook.com/kodstelia))

### 12 Enjoy the match

In its element during the 2018 World Cup, Element is a party bar with multiple screens and late-opening



Galerija Rigo

hours so celebrations can go on into the night. More a café/bar during the week, at weekends, Element attracts a young local crowd for DJs and occasional live music in a loungey atmosphere. Aperol Spritz is the drink du choix, though plenty of beers will be sunk by the time anyone's thinking about going home.

→ Prolaz Venecije 2, Novigrad (099 214 6882, [facebook.com/Element.Novigrad](https://facebook.com/Element.Novigrad))

### 13 Admire history carved in stone

Designed by the award-winning architects Saša Rendić and Iris Turato, the Museum Lapidarium in the heart of Novigrad offers a prime example of how to design a contemporary, site-specific museum in a historic centre. Along with early medieval stone monuments, the museum shows a key example of pre-Romanesque architecture: the Carolingian-style vaulted altar canopy, the so-called Mauritius Ciborium, from the eighth century. Here, early Christian symbols can be discerned, delicately carved intertwining patterns and an array of animals and mythical beasts. The museum also hosts multimedia and multidisciplinary cultural events

throughout the year.

→ Veliki trg 8A, Novigrad (052 726 582, [muzej-lapidarium.hr](http://muzej-lapidarium.hr))

### 14 Enjoy a half-century of culinary tradition

Approaching its 50th anniversary, this third-generation, family-run classic has been around since the start of modern Istrian tourism. Sidro ('Anchor') only uses fish from the immediate vicinity, heavy on shellfish and sole as the sea is shallower here. It's right on the fishermen's marina and locals show up to eat. For the best shellfish, come in November. The fish platter Noštromo is a solid tip: white fish, squid, grilled scampi, potatoes and spinach. Same goes for the lobster with tagliatelle, which runs to 300kn. There's a nautical interior and terrace – ignore the neon sign and pictures of the food.

→ Mandrač 5, Novigrad (052 757 601, [sidro-ancora.com](http://sidro-ancora.com))

### 15 Catch a challenging exhibition

Part of the Museum Lapidarium complex, the Rigo Gallery stages exhibitions of contemporary and

cutting-edge art, some challenging (the strange figurines of Denis Krašković, the graphic images of passion by Olja Grubić), some iconic (the photos of John & Yoko displayed in the summer of 2017, the Daniel Spoerri collages of 2018). The building itself is worth further investigation, once the home of the Rigo nobility, its frontage a prime example of Venetian Baroque.

→ Veliki trg 8A, Novigrad (052 726 582, [muzej-lapidarium.hr/c/rigo-en](http://muzej-lapidarium.hr/c/rigo-en))

### 16 Find a slice of Americana

A sister establishment to the original venue in Zagreb, Booze & Blues has set up at the Hotel Nautica at Novigrad marina, offering the sounds and flavours from across the Atlantic. The music, occasionally provided live on stage by an act from around the region, brings a little jazz, blues or soul to the party, complemented by similarly themed décor courtesy Mario Waldgoni. There's a Stateside touch to the menu too, though it's no coincidence that the Adriatic is alongside, lapping the popular terrace.

→ Sv Anton 15, Novigrad (052 600 456, [booze-and-blues.com](http://booze-and-blues.com))

### 17 Try windsurfing, paragliding or parasailing

Round the corner from the Novigrad headland, Belistra water-sports centre offers all kinds of active fun on and off the coast. You can climb 200 metres above the sea parasailing, jet-ski on a top-of-the-range Yamaha WaveRunner or take the whole family on a banana-boat ride. Courses include windsurfing, kitesurfing and SUP, instructed by a Croatian champion, and there are also canoes and wakeboards to hire.

→ Livada 1, Novigrad (091 522 8810, [belistra.hr](http://belistra.hr))

### 18 Devour hearty dishes in an authentic German Biergarten

The bedrock of this cheery operation, approaching its 40th anniversary, is the marriage between Hans from the Rhineland and Ines from Tar-Vabriga. The result? Ines & Hans, a convivial beer garden, restaurant and bed & breakfast in one. Here you'll be eating meat, meat and more meat, all washed down with half-litres of pure golden German beer. You can choose from the regular menu or opt for the daily special, often



Damir & Ornella



specially smoked, such as spare ribs on Saturdays, and pulled pork on Fridays. Wednesdays, it's suckling pig, a house speciality. Sausage also features heavily, of course. All takes place on a sun-dappled terrace, plentiful trees offering plentiful shade.

→ Porečka 5A, Tar (052 443 129, ines-hans.de)

## 19 Sip then dip

Right by the jetty that juts out just where Novigrad runs out of land, Waikiki's Beach Bar allows you to sink summer cocktails, slink down the metal staircase into the sea, swim off the effects then climb back up for more. By day, you might want to stick to beer, especially as you can easily get involved in a game of beach volleyball and may need liquid sustenance before another plunge into the Adriatic. A late-morning coffee here also does the trick as you treat your hangover to the soothing lap of the waves.

→ Gradska vrata 15, Novigrad

## 20 Dine at an Istrian tavern 50 years in the business

Opened in 1964, the prices (and currencies) may have changed at the Konoba Teran, but not the relation to everyday affordability, whatever the decade. Right in the heart of Tar, this classic spot knows just what to do with meat and knows just what to do with fish. Grilled steak with mushrooms exudes tradition while sea bream or bass might come with djuvec rice or the regular blitva greens. Do ask for a basket of home-made bread, and perhaps a table by the fireplace on chillier evenings. Framed football shirts and pennants add a little colour to the bare brick and timeless rustic appearance.

→ Istarska 35, Novigrad (098 167 3825, facebook.com/konobaTeranIstra)

## 21 Search for traces of early Christianity

Known to locals as simply the 'Cathedral', the St Pelagius Parish



Waikiki's Beach

Church dates back to the early Christian period – or, at least, pre-Carolingian. Later rebuilds, several of them, took place between the 15th and 18th centuries, hence the Baroque flourishes such as the main altar and sacral pictures. But look hard enough and you can still see traces from more than a thousand years ago, such as the window niches in the north wall. Sadly the pre-Romanesque crypt, one of the few in Croatia, is out of bounds – it contains ecclesiastical artefacts from the early medieval era.

→ Veliki trg, Novigrad

## 22 Eat well at wallet-friendly prices

Popular with budget visitors, the Konoba kod Kristijana is a local eatery where Istrian favourites are served in satisfying portions. And you needn't just bulk out on pasta – the fish and shellfish are fresh, the Kvarner

scampi delicious when grilled or prepared na buzaru in wine. The Beletić family would even be happy to prepare your fish ispod peke, slow-cooked under hot embers, provided they are given fair warning. Warm bread and the family's own-made olive oil from their Al Torcio mill is the traditional appetiser to every meal. They also run the affordable Torci 18 B&B a few doors down from this restaurant.

→ Bolnička ulica 8, Novigrad (098 420 314, facebook.com/Konoba-Kod-Kristijana-116035611820156)

## 23 Sink Istrian Malvazija in 18th-century surroundings

Its casual terrace occupying a small square of pavement in a narrow passageway in Novigrad's historic centre, the Rigo Wine Bar is both tasteful and authentic. It also serves top-notch Cattunar wines from Brtonigla in the terroir of west

Istria. Classic regional finger food is also available, cheeses, olives and air-dried prosciutto. The building itself dates back to the 1700s, its atmospheric façade lending an Italianate touch to proceedings.

→ Palazzo Rigo, Velika ulica 5, Novigrad (091 577 2874, rigo-winebar.com)

## 24 Explore a British warship

Sunk off the coast of Novigrad with days of World War II coming to an end, the HMS Coriolanus served in North Africa before taking part in suspected spying activities in this part of Istria. In May 1945, it hit a mine and sank. Now upright on the seabed about 25 metres deep, it is a popular dive site. A club such as Zeus Faber in Lanterna, facing Novigrad from across the Mirna estuary, can take you out to the wreck and also rent out equipment. Beginners may explore the shallower waters around Lanterna, with its wealth of flora and fauna.

→ SC Valeta, Lanterna, Tar-Vabriga (052 405 045, zeus-faber.com)

## 25 Kod Marice

Now in business more than 40 years, Kod Marice relies on the zmorac to bring in that day's catch, the fishing boat providing the prawns, mussels, scallops and scampi that make the seafood risotto so popular here, the John Dory before it's grilled or baked to perfection, and the squid you'll delight in. There's meat, too, hopefully suckling pig on the day of your visit. Desserts go way beyond the basic provision of ice cream, and the wine has been well chosen.

→ Ulica Murve 3B (052 757 217, kodmarice.business.site)

## 26 Konoba Amfora

Right on the Novigrad Marina, the Konoba Amfora allows you to tuck into fresh fish and shellfish while taking in a stunning sunset across the bay. Find a table lapped by the sea, ask the waiter what's fresh that day and let the evening take its course.

→ Ribarnička 12 (052 726 298)

## 27 Konoba Gatto Nero

In operation since 1982, the Black Cat Tavern is tucked away down a little alleyway only a few steps from the sea, and well worth the trouble of finding. The scampi,

squid and octopus are sourced from the Kvarner Bay, the John Dory fish from nearby waters and the boškarin meat from producers a short drive away inland. Here the steak comes with black truffles and Istrian prosciutto, although you can also order beef cheeks in teran wine.

→ Zidine 10 (052 255 555, gatonero.eu)

## 28 Lungomare

The sea-facing Lungomare, close to Karpinjan beach, does an excellent job with sea bass, bream and tuna, as well as steak, but you shouldn't be disappointed if you opt for the gnocchi with porcini mushrooms and speck ham. The pizzas are also top-notch, with more variety than you'll find elsewhere. Not the cheapest, but you're paying for the view as well as the quality of fare.

→ Karpinjana (052 649 331, lungomare-novigrad.com)

## 29 Marina Restaurant Novigrad

Marina as in Marina Gaši, the pioneering chef who steers the kitchen at this bright spot close to Novigrad's waterfront and, indeed, marina. A visit here is a culinary adventure, diners placing their trust in Marina's balancing instincts. Before you enter, you should know that every dish of the half-dozen you'll be served has seafood at its centre – and a lot of it will be raw. And nearly all of it, the raw scampi on brioche with pickled wild asparagus, the steamed sea bass with garlic, oil and peperoncino potato, will be a miniature triumph. Desserts are equally petite and bursting with invention. Let your waiter also guide you on wine, Istrian of top quality.

→ Svetog Antona 38 (098 969 0492, facebook.com/MarinaRestaurantNovigrad)

## 30 Restoran Mandrač

The walls at the back of the 50-year-old Mandrač are covered in gastronomic awards and even though there are seats for 215 diners, you should reserve in summer. Framed against the 600-year-old city walls, fresh fish and grilled meats are well presented on warmed plates, garnished according to the friendly advice offered by the waiter.

→ Ulica Mandrač 6 (052 757 120, facebook.com/RestaurantMandrač)



The Church of St. Pelagius and St. Maximus

**BEST OF THE REST**

**Tri Palme**

From late March until late October, the Tri Palme provides honest-to-goodness Istrian cuisine on a sunny terrace near the marina. The fish soup is full of flavour and goodness, the risotto and pasta dishes as good as you'll find at this price anywhere in Novigrad. A penchant for old-school rock attracts seen-it-all regulars among the many tourists and July 26 is Mick Jagger Day, celebrated here as if it were Christmas.

→ Karpinjanska 14 (052 757 081, facebook.com/TriPalmeNovigrad)

**Vecchio Mulino**

Just in from the waterfront, this large, smart house contains a restaurant of similar character, brave enough to offer a truly extensive menu – and carry most off most dishes to everyone's satisfaction. If you're after a decent plate of calamari, you'll find it here. If you've a hankering for a hunk of soft, tender meat, they cook it here. Pizza? No problem, you'll have few complaints about the ones served here. Multi-lingual and swift staff help things along nicely.

→ Mlinska 8 (052 647 451)

**BEACHES**

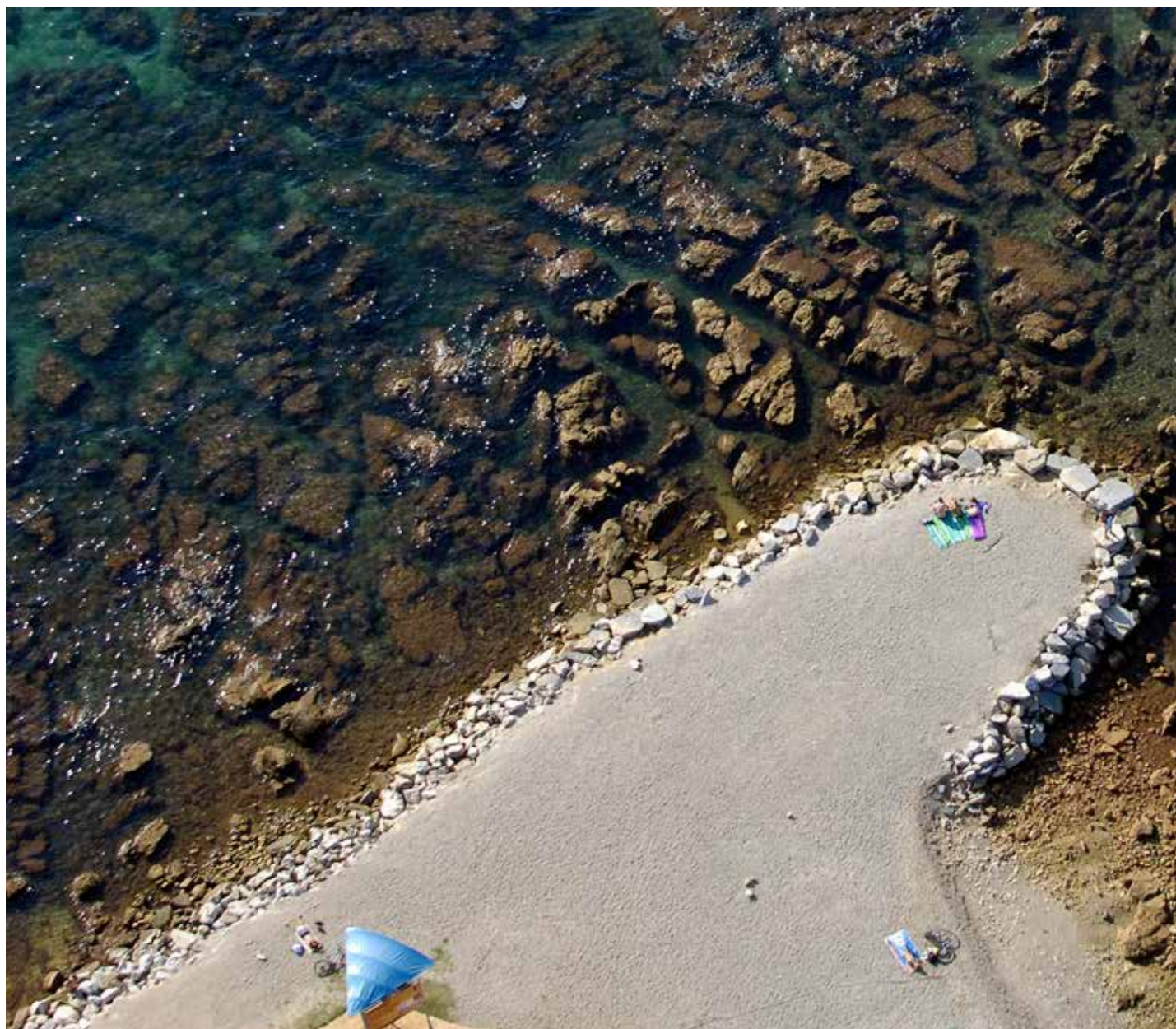
Novigrad is built around a bay and two headlands, its historic centre a few steps away from the waterfront.

The most popular beach, Karpinjan, is always a hive of activity all summer, surrounded by bars, eateries and sports courts for tennis, basketball and five-a-side football. The small pebbles and shallow water here mean that it's ideal for children, and you can rent sun loungers and umbrellas and make a whole day of it here. To get to it, walk ten minutes from the marina round the bay.

Further up, Pineta is more rough and ready, with pine trees for shade

and intimacy – it's popular with couples, who may enjoy a quieter time here without children running around. Beach bars open in season.

In the other direction, close to the town centre, Rivarela is less beach, more a paved strip for sunbathing and relaxation, but its proximity to everything in Novigrad means that many come down here after work in the summer months. Hold on to the hand railings as you go down into the water – the sea here can be quite wild. It sits alongside the City Beach, similar in character and equally close to the bars and restaurants in town, meaning you can enjoy a couple of hours of bathing before heading straight over to lunch or an evening meal.



**The bar with the best sunset view in Istria**

Vitriol – Café, Cocktail & Wine Bar

**VITRIOL**

Ribarnička 6,  
52466 Novigrad- Istria  
CROATIA

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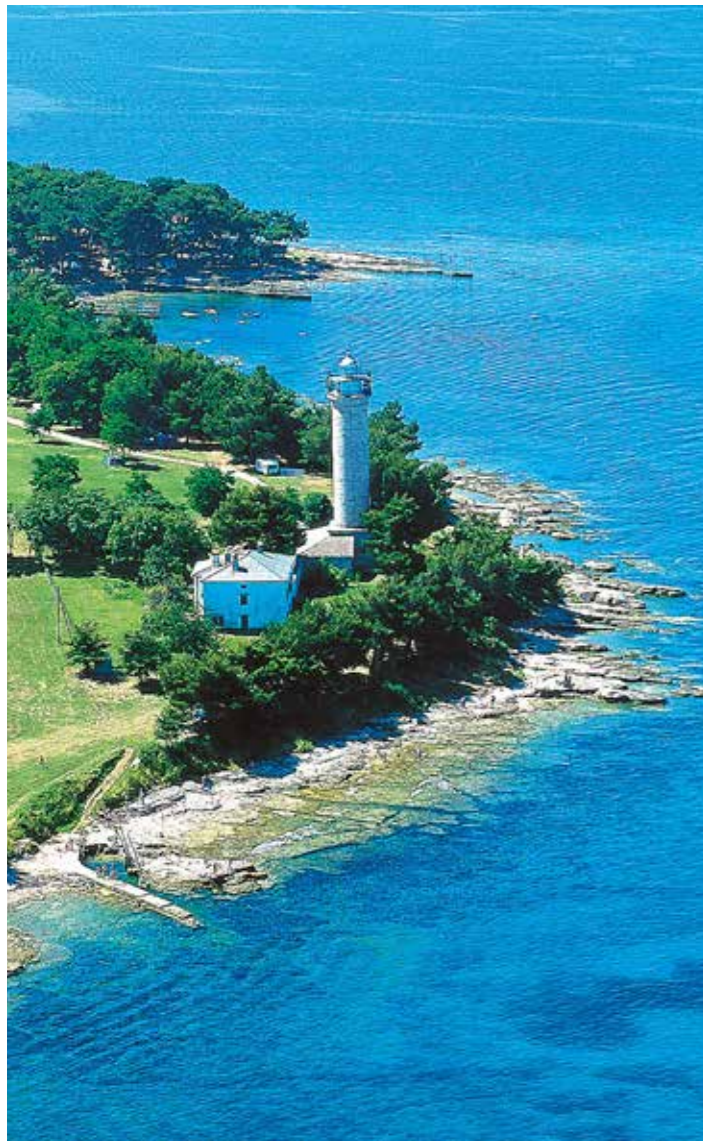
Vitriol isn't just another typical bar in Novigrad. It's a fun meeting place with a business philosophy based on top-notch service and an uncompromising selection of drinks.

The excellent seaside location with a view of anchored sailboats and unforgettable sunsets makes the perfect backdrop for relaxing in great company.

Morning coffee, afternoon cocktails or an evening glass of wine... Visit us and find out why all our guests feel at home here at any time of day.

# Umag & Savudrija Top 20

The host of the Croatia Open, Umag dates to Roman times. Little brother Savudrija is an unspoiled fishing village where Croatians relax.



**JUTTING OUT** into the Gulf of Trieste, close to the border with Slovenia, north-west Istria is known for its sporting activities. The main resort town of Umag stages Croatia's major annual tennis tournament while there's an 18-hole golf course just in from the coast at Crveni Vrh. Round the headland, up-and-coming Savudrija attracts windsurfers, the cape guarded by the oldest lighthouse on the Adriatic. A growing number of visitors are attracted to this wilder coastline, served by an ever-improving hotel stock and range of restaurants.

## 1 Sleep at the oldest lighthouse in the Adriatic

Rented out by the week, all year round – €700 for four in late September must be a bargain – Savudrija Lighthouse stands at Croatia's most westerly point. As the inscription along the base says, it was partly sponsored by Francis I of Austria during the Napoleonic era – the last Holy Roman Emperor was in attendance when the lighthouse was first lit in 1818. Originally fuelled by coal gas, making it the first of its kind, the lighthouse increased in size from 19 metres to 29 in the late 1800s. Converted into a unique lodging for up to four people in 2000, this icon of Savudrija still flashes automatically out to sea – and it can still be seen from Opicina just outside Trieste.

→ [plovput.hr](http://plovput.hr)



Sea Star Festival

## 2 Let your hair down at a live venue

For an honest night of chugging back beers and letting a few guitar-driven rock tunes blast away for an hour or so, Umag's American Bar is your place. A local institution opened in the 1990s, with a slightly retro feel, the American Bar eschews the loungey, laid-back beats found nearby along the coast for a bit of twelve-bar blues between the Park Punta and Umag's football ground, on Savudrijska ulica. As the agenda is dominated by tribute bands – Zep, Oasis, Queen – you'll know all the words and be singing along by the time the third beer kicks in.

→ [Savudrijska ulica, Umag \(095 904 8583, facebook.com/pg/americanbar.umag\)](https://www.facebook.com/pg/americanbar.umag)

## 3 Splash out on exquisite seafood

Since 1986, the Badurina-Badi family has been serving discerning diners from around Central Europe, who flock to their seafood restaurant in the pretty little maritime community of Lovrečica just outside Umag. Known for its carpaccios – queen scallops with garlic mousse, for example – the Badi concocts an outstanding house buzara for two, lobster, scampi and pilgrim scallops gently cooked in a white-wine sauce. To accompany, choose a local wine, which means to say

CUJ or Monte Rosso from up the road in Umag.

→ [Umaška ulica 12, Lovrečica \(052 756 293, restaurant-badi.com\)](https://www.facebook.com/pg/americanbar.umag)

## 4 Play a full 18 holes from Vineyard to Pines

While Spain is scattered with scores of golf courses, Croatia is more limited with what it can do to provide golfers with the full 18-hole experience. The exception is right up here in Savudrija. Attached to the Kempinski Hotel Adriatic, Golf Adriatic is a challenging yet jaw-droppingly picturesque course designed by Diethard Fahrenleitner and Barbara Eisserer of Tyrol-based Golf Art Landscape. As opposed to imposing an American-style golf design on a European landscape, these graduates of the University of Natural Resources in Vienna have created courses around Central Europe that factor in natural features and ecology. The par 72 Golf Adriatic blends in with the scenery, so holes such as Three Oaks, Romanic Church and Sea View are named with the views in mind. The first tee, Vineyard, sets the tone with a perfect vista of the Gulf of Piran. The 19th hole hasn't been forgotten either, there are Istrian specialities at the Restaurant

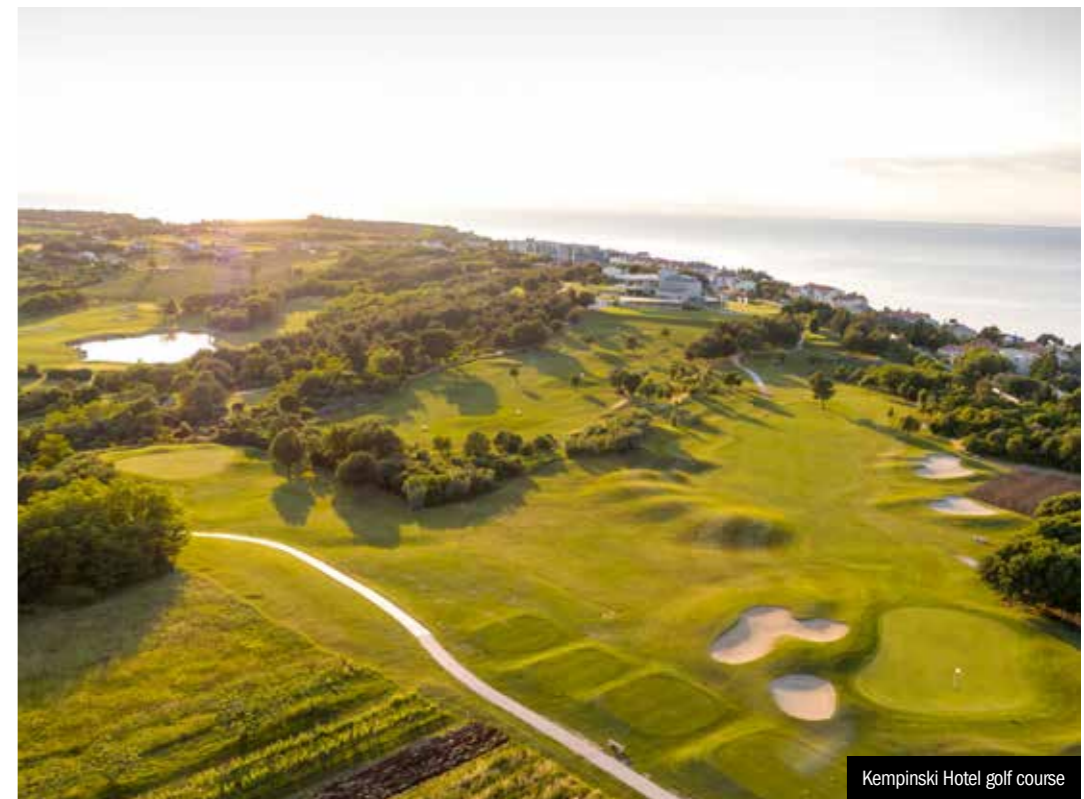
Slice and golf tuition is given from beginners upwards.

→ [Alberi 300, Savudrija \(052 707 100, golf-adriatic.com\)](https://www.golf-adriatic.com)

## 5 Catch 70 acts on seven stages at Sea Star

Over two days in May.

bookended by opening and closing parties, Sea Star attracts 80,000 festivalgoers to the Stella Maris resort site in Umag. Bargain early-bird prices boost ticket sales even before any names are confirmed – 2018 saw the likes of Paul van Dijk and Robin Schulz.



Kempinski Hotel golf course

## Umag & Savudrija Top 20

2017 Fatboy Slim and The Prodigy. The biggest names in the region's rap and electronic rhythm scene can also be expected, Edo Maajka, Krankšvester and Ian F the ones to kick ass in 2018. Dates for 2019, the third annual Sea Star, are May 24-25, with parties either side. Early bird tickets start from €39. → [Stella Maris, Umag \(seastarfestival.com\)](http://stellamaris.umag.seastarfestival.com)

## 6 Park and ride in Umag

Similar to major European capitals, Umag operates a park and ride service, allowing you pick up and drop back a short-hire bike at six points around town. Between 6am and midnight, visitors can take a standard bicycle for a minimum of 18kn for 1hr or 42kn for 24hrs. There's also a deposit of 300kn, paid back onto your card when you return the bike in time. The service allows you to explore the Umag seafront or pine-lined trails around the Stella Maris lagoon.

→ [istriaexperience.com/en/park-and-ride-umag](http://istriaexperience.com/en/park-and-ride-umag)

## 7 Bask in a panoramic spa

Looking out over sea, sunset and the distant tip of Slovenia on the horizon, the Carolea spa at the Kempinski Hotel Adriatic outside Savudrija calls itself an 'energy clinic'. Its job is to relax and rejuvenate. The catalogue of massages



ATP Plava Laguna Croatia Open Umag

available fills a thick brochure, and includes hot-stone, four-hand energizing (with two masseurs), warm-oil and Chinese-healing. There are hammams, too – queen’s, king’s, Turkish, Moroccan and royal – or you can hire your own private spa studio for two hours. The complex is open to non-residents, too, with plenty of packages to choose from.

→ Alberi 300A, Savudrija (052 707 080, [kempinski.com/en/istria/hotel-adriatic/luxury-spa](http://kempinski.com/en/istria/hotel-adriatic/luxury-spa))

## 8 Play beach volleyball then sink cocktails

Occupying an extensive stretch of greenery and beach on a little headland jutting out south of Umag town centre, the summer-only Afrika Beach Bar offers fun for younger ones by day and grown-ups after dark. Open for coffee and a bracing dip from 9am, the ABB warms up in the early afternoon for beach volleyball and all kinds of seaside activity. After a rewarding fill of grilled meat, čevapi, say, as the sun sinks so do the beers, plus cocktails, perhaps accompanied by a live band. It all runs until 2am, when everything packs up until the coffee machine sparks into action the next morning.

→ Moela (091 896 2696, [facebook.com/afrikabeachbar](https://facebook.com/afrikabeachbar))

## 9 See the world's top tennis stars

Taking place over ten days in the heat of July, the Plava Laguna Croatia Open is one of the most distinctive on the ATP circuit. Set at the Goran Ivanišević tennis stadium at Stella Maris, backdropped by the Adriatic, the Croatia Open also offers a full party agenda, with free admission to see the country’s top singers and jazz musicians. Due to be staged for the 30th time in 2019, the event attracts some 100,000 visitors from across Central Europe who also tuck into Istrian specialties at 30 outlets around the site. Dates for 2019 are July 12-21.

→ ATP Goran Ivanišević Stadion, Savudrijska cesta, Umag (052 719 125, [croatiaopen.hr](http://croatiaopen.hr))

## 10 Ride the train to Polynesia

If you’re staying at one of Umag’s out-of-town resort hotels or campsites, one way to nip around the seafront is to take the tourist train that shuttles every 45 minutes all seven kilometres to the beach area of Polinezija and back. The service, actually a slow-moving motorised vehicle dressed up to look like a locomotive, harks back to the earliest days of mass tourism here when holidaymakers paid

a few dinars to ride the Katoro Express. The Umag tourist train takes 30 minutes to run its course and costs 20kn.

→ [tamar-umag.hr](http://tamar-umag.hr)

## 11 Feast at Croatia's furthest tip

Trace a line on the map from the most southerly tip of Croatia, past Dubrovnik, then move your finger all the way up, past 2,000 islands, right to its most north-westerly point, and this is where you arrive – a pretty marina overlooked by a modern-looking restaurant, facing Italy beyond. This is Savudrija and this is the St Andrea restaurant. And this is where you savour fine fresh fish, served on pristine white tablecloths by waitstaff in smart waistcoats. Not, it’s not the height of A-list luxury as you might experience in Dubrovnik, but it’s quality, nonetheless, and a much more informal experience, given the relaxed terrace out front with nothing but sea, sky and boats to distract your attention from your plate. Don’t forget to linger over dessert – this family has 30 years’ experience of running the place, and will suggest what’s good that day.

→ Luka 5C, Savudrija (098 334 651, [restoransavudrija.com](http://restoransavudrija.com))

## 12 Discover the sunken town of Sipar

It’s hard to imagine now, given the constant holiday buzz of Umag compared with this silent archaeological park four kilometres north, but Sipar was once a thriving community in Roman times. In fact, its destruction, during battles between Croatia and Venetians in the late 800s, allowed nearby Umag to develop. Visit here in low tide, and you see the walls and stumps of buildings that made up the houses, workshops, tower and warehouses of this waterfront settlement. At the Umag City Museum in town, there’s a display of some of the tools and ceramics discovered here, and the museum can also lay on a guided tour of the Sipar site.

## 13 Take in some challenging art

Founded by conceptual artist Slavica Marin in 1997, the Marin Gallery has been showcasing the likes of Edo Murtić, Andres Serrano and Bruce Nauman over the last 20 years or more. Slavica’s hunger to attract some of the world’s most sought-after contemporary artists has made her gallery unique in the region – with the exception of the Museum

of Contemporary Art of Istria in Pula, there’s nothing else like it. The agenda constantly changes at this intimate apartment space in a classic stone building in Umag’s Old Town – late November 2018 saw the opening of Istrajnost, featuring the cyanotype-treated photography of Drago Vejnović. The gallery is found on the narrow street leading from the Umag City Museum to Trg Venecije and Trg slobode, sometimes also referred to as Ribarska.

→ Marino Bembo 7A, Umag (098 366 248, [facebook.com/Galerija-Marin-298164147298613](https://facebook.com/Galerija-Marin-298164147298613))

## 14 Tuck into perfect pizza

Long before the Kempinski Hotel took up half the headland around Crveni Vrh with a five-star spa resort hotel, golf course and all, the Pizzeria Laura was serving quality pizzas onto classic green-checked tabletops. It was also luxuriating in one of the finest sea views in all Croatia, no idle boast, one that it still enjoys despite all the upscale activity a kilometre or so west. Some 30 types are offered, everyone’s favourite variety, though judging by the top-notch seafood that sits atop enticing plates of spaghetti, a maritime choice pizza-wise wouldn’t be a bad idea. On big football nights, such as during the 2018 World Cup, attention wanders from the Adriatic to

the TV screen set up inside, staff straining to catch the score as the place jumps with excitement. No wonder so many guests at the Kempinski break up their routine luxury for a spot of unadorned hospitality.

→ Crveni Vrh 15A (052 737 004, [pizzerialaura.business.site](http://pizzerialaura.business.site))

## 15 Tour Umag's oldest building

Overlooking the edge of the peninsula that holds in Umag’s historic centre, the Bishop’s Tower dates back to the late 1300s, when the Genoese were a constant threat. Constructed as a fortress than converted into a more habitable property in the 1800s, this doughty look-out became the Umag City Museum in 1976. Thanks to the acquisition of a private archaeological collection 20 years later, this is now a worthwhile, two-storey attraction with a scattering of Roman and maritime finds on display and occasional temporary exhibitions. Most of all, though, this square-shaped redoubt gives the visitor a real sense of Umag’s attraction to passing pirates of yore – and its vulnerability.

→ Trg sv Martina 1 (052 720 386)

## 16 Watch a classic regatta

There’s something quite magnificent about seeing scores of yachts, pristine sails billowing in the wind, about to

set off and race across an azure Adriatic. Such is the Istrian Regatta, which usually takes place over the first weekend in June, setting out from the seafront at Umag. After the inauguration event at the ACI Marina on the Friday, the boats gather at Umag harbour at 11am the next day before the first stage down the coast to Rovinj. Spectators standing high up at the Park Punta can then watch competitors veer south, on their journey towards the finishing point of Pula on the Sunday. 2018 saw the event’s 70th anniversary celebrated in real style with 113 participants racing in 34 boats.

## 17 Take the family on a real adventure

The Jangalooz Adventure Park means active recreation for all the family, from April to October, in the welcome shade of pine forest by the campsite at Stella Maris in Umag. Kids from as young as three can join in, clambering up climbing frames set at yellow level. Degrees of difficulty go right up to red, the elevated rope walkway for ten year olds and over, but the only the bravest of the brave tackle the Janga Jump, a free fall from a tower 12 metres high, the Swiss-made Saferoller belay system meaning that safety is assured.

→ Camping Stella Maris, Umag (098 901 1194, [jangalooz.com](http://jangalooz.com))

## 18 Explore reefs in the Gulf of Piran

Even novice divers can enjoy the diverse sites offered by the Gulf of Piran, which separates the coast off Savudrija from Slovenia. From the Subaquatic dive centre in Umag, a boat takes you round the headland to the reefs where the coastline suddenly descends to a depth of 20 metres. With near guaranteed excellent visibility, you should be able to spot lobsters, conger eels and scorpion fish, as well as all kinds of bright fish and crabs. For children and absolute beginners, there’s a site right in front of the dive centre at Stella Maris, where even at a depth of five metres sea stars, seahorses and crabs can be spotted.

→ Savudrijska cesta (052 663 220, [subaquatic.info](http://subaquatic.info))

## 19 Dine in hidden bucolic greenery

Halfway between Umag and Savudrija, Zambratija is one of those coastal spots you can drive past without noticing the attractions that entice tourists to overlook the bigger resorts in its favour. Without noticing, in fact, in greenery tucked in from the coast, the Restoran Antonia. The menu here is simple but sufficient – you can splash out on lobster, try the fish-and-thyme ravioli or split a fish platter between you. Everything, excepting the ever-exclusive lobster, is affordable and those tired of the holiday crowds of Umag will enjoy taking their time over a meal amid birdsong. Closed on Wednesdays.

→ Crvene uvala ulica 16, Zambratija (052 759 565, [restoran-antonia.com](http://restoran-antonia.com))

## 20 Let the kids go wild at a water park

At Umag’s lagoon resort of Stella Maris and over on Camp Umag, the Wibit aquapark has been offering waterborne family fun for 15 summers. Floating atop safe, shallow seawater are a tower, a slide, a climbing game, a trampoline and a water catapult, all close to the beach so parents can keep an eye on everything while sunbathing. There’s always a lifeguard on hand in any case. Admission is by the hour, half-day, day or even the week.

→ [aquapark-umag.com](http://aquapark-umag.com)



Plava Laguna outdoor pool Aquapark

# The coast with the most

The seaside resorts of Umag and Poreč provide the perfect Mediterranean escape. Find your Istrian idyll with Plava Laguna.



**THE SEASIDE RESORTS** of Umag and Poreč provide the perfect Mediterranean escape and deliver once in a lifetime moments, every day. For an unforgettable stay, choose one of their resorts, campsites, apartments and hotels – inspiring locations are the heart of the Plava Laguna experience.

Whether you're staying in one of the 5-star hotels or 2-star apartments, Plava Laguna's high standards of service are reflected in every moment of your stay. Dive into saltwater pools, enjoy your favourite ice cream, feel the excitement of paragliding over the Adriatic or dine luxuriously with friends below the stars. Plava Laguna's vacation playgrounds and friendly, attentive staff are here to make sure every day of your vacation is a happy one. In particular, Poreč and Umag are two Istrian treasures that shouldn't be missed while visiting the peninsula.

Beautiful beaches, fabulous nightlife and great food and wine are a given, but there are also beguiling stone towns, ecclesiastical attractions and wildlife to enjoy, so which to choose? Whether you're after a fun holiday with family, a romantic honeymoon or an action-packed weekender, there's sure to be an Istrian getaway to suit you. Not sure where to go? Discover your Istrian idyll with Plava Laguna.

## UMAG

### Croatia's tennis capital

Umag is famous for hosting Croatia's premier tennis tournament, the Plava Laguna ATP Croatia Open. Taking place right in the Stella Maris Resort, thousands of visitors flock to the resort and stay in the premium hotels, apartments, suites and luxurious villas placed within pretty, tree-lined boulevards just metres away from pine-shaded beaches. But Umag offers more than just spectator sports. Visitors take advantage of the tennis facilities available at the resort and at the Umag Tennis Academy, booking lessons with pros or simply playing amongst themselves.

### Active Umag

Other activities include windsurfing, volleyball and diving. Cycling and jogging are popular pastimes which you can pursue at your own pace with 40 km of the Umag Riviera to explore, including a cycling and running path that starts in the centre and leads out to the magical Savudrija Lighthouse. Umag is a town where you'll never be stuck for things to do.

### City breakers

Outside of its active appeal, guests enjoy spending their downtime strolling Umag's charmingly Italianate Old Town, its seaside promenade full of cute cafés and restaurants with views across the sea. The Church of the Assumption of Mary and St Peregrine on the town's main square is a must-see and for those wishing to dig a little deeper into Istrian history and culture, Umag offers a museum and several independent art galleries. Younger visitors always enjoy the town's Aquarium.



## POREČ

### Culture trip

Located in the middle of Istria's west coast, Poreč offers some of the region's most impressive historical sights, stunning natural beauty and everything you could want from a family holiday. In particular, the jaw-dropping sixth-century Euphrasian Basilica is the most important surviving example of Byzantine art in Croatia, the walls shimmering with gold-gilt and mother of pearl mosaics that still reflect the light as brightly as when they were first made (if you enjoy mosaics you should also catch the one located in the former Bishop's Palace). You can climb the complex's belfry for views of the Adriatic's wide, blue expanse.

### Wondrous wildlife

Just outside the town, the Baredine Cave is a spectacular series of underground lakes and chambers, filled with naturally sculpted stalactites and stalagmites. The expanse of pebble and rocky beaches around Plava Laguna's Zelena Resort offer a rugged, dramatic beauty with crystal-clear waters for bathing. Walkways follow the coast to both sides of town, some located near Plava Laguna sites.

### Day-trippers

From Poreč, you can go anywhere in Istria. Only two hours from Venice by boat, it's also an easy hop over to Italy and a great place to embark on a day trip. But Poreč offers enough to keep anyone occupied by its marvellous beaches, food and ancient attractions - all within easy reach from over a dozen Plava Laguna properties.

Discover more at [plavalaguna.com](http://plavalaguna.com)

# Buje & Brtonigla Top 20

Brtonigla is a well-preserved village and a renowned gastro-enclave. Buje is home to Venetian palaces and medieval architecture.

## 1 Buje & Brtonigla

Rolling hills, bucolic vineyards and olive groves typify this classic expanse of north-west Istria, tucked inside the Slovenian border. Overlooking the surroundings, elevated Buje is the largest and most significant town here, then Brtonigla, just south of it. With such natural riches at their disposal, a new generation of ambitious, hard-working locals and an Italian heritage, this area has become a renowned gastro-enclave. San Rocco is a classic case in point. In between the two communities, Konoba Morgan is a tucked-away culinary gem Italians flock to at weekends.

## 2 Indulge in luxury at San Rocco

Its gourmet restaurant almost certainly the best in Istria, perhaps even Croatia, San Rocco is also a heritage hotel with personalised treatments at its spa centre, a large outdoor pool and 14 luxurious rooms, some with a hydro massage bath. Truffle, game and fresh-fish dishes are prepared with San Rocco's own extra virgin olive oil – the seasonal dégustation menu is the way to go, and if you're here in summer, you get to dine by the pool. Accompanying wines are well chosen, comprising a selection of some 200 labels. The restaurant is also open to non-residents, and



San Rocco Restaurant

operates on midweek evenings between Tuesday and Thursday, and through the day between Friday and Sunday.

→ Srednja ulica 2, Brtonigla (052 725 000, san-rocco.hr).

## 3 Descend into the underworld

Accessible to any who can negotiate its steep stairs, Mramornica Cave sits between Nova Ves and Brtonigla, just off main road E751. Open from April to October, this long-visited attraction allows visitors to negotiate its long lit walkways by holding onto the railings as they go, with plenty of space above to the sides thanks to its dimensions several metres tall and wide. What is daunting, though, is when you gaze into the depths beyond the safety railing, and imagine what might be down those deep dark fathoms. In the main chamber, nature has given the dripstone red



Marble cave

## Buje & Brtonigla Top 20

and white hues, the stalagmites rising to significant heights. Guided visits last 30 minutes. After your visit, you can pop into the Restoran Agroturizam Sterle next door for lunch – the restaurant not only looks after the running of the cave but keeps its Barrique wine barrels cool down there.

→ Stancija Drušković 20, Brtonigla (052 774 313, agroturizamsterle.hr/en/spilja-en.html)

## 4 See how generations of Istrians lived

If the Buje Ethnographic Museum is anything to go by, rural life in this part of Istria was extremely tough. Over four floors done out to look like a typical peasant's house, this collection of nearly 200 exhibits shows the tools, furniture and household items that a Buje local would have considered part of daily life a century or more ago. An olive-oil press and forge sit in the basement, while the kitchen above is not only functional but communal, for here the family would sit by the fireplace. A weaver's loom also features, as well as chests where clothes and precious items were kept. Occasional temporary exhibitions relate to the ethnographic and anthropological subject matter.

→ Trg Inosipa Broza Tita 6, Buje (052 772 023)

## Buje & Brtonigla Top 20

### 5 Savour succulent slow-cooked fish

In operation since 1980, the Konoba Astarea can offer many memorable specialities, but none more memorable or more special than its dishes prepared pod pekom. This involves a slow, braising method, enhancing all moistures and flavours under a dome-like cooking bell, or peka. Usually a whole fish or lamb is the centrepiece, accompanied by potatoes and all kinds of vegetables. As if the atmosphere of the Astarea wasn't homely enough, with its old photos, piano and open fire where various dishes are also prepared, lending your meal a great smoky taste. Amiable chef/owner Anton Kernjus will talk you through the day's menu, likely to include sea bass, conger eel and sole. There are meat alternatives too, though here fish and seafood are the way to go, scampi buzara and grilled scallops also recommended. For dessert, apple strudel is another house speciality.

→ Ronkova 9, Brtonigla (052 774 384, 091 539 6889)

### 6 Pamper yourself at a luxury spa

Recently voted 'Wellness Hotel of the Year' in Croatia, the five-star Hotel Mulino on the Croatia-Slovenia border (literally!), a short drive north of Buje, attracts many visitors from either country keen on a weekend of Thalio treatments and relaxing in a Roman sauna. There's a Turkish bath and Finnish sauna too, plus pools indoor (with hydro massage) and out. Mulino is mainly known, however, as a casino hotel, with 20 gaming tables and 260 slot machines, a 24/7 world of bright lights and spinning wheels. Palm trees outside even offer that Las Vegas touch.

→ Škrile 75A, Plovanija (052 725 300, mulino.hr).

### 7 Hike along the Mirna river

Leading from Nova Vas, near Brtonigla, a tarmac track runs all the way to the Škarline Nature Park. Here the pretty river Mirna, Istria's longest, twists and turns through verdant slopes, perfect hiking country. Škarline itself is one of the streams that feeds into it, its waters pure and lime-coloured, reflecting the ample greenery that provides welcome shade in



Konoba Astarea

summer. Bridges and cascades also feature, and make sure to pack supplies to set up a picnic at one of several designed spots.

### 8 Tour a top winery

Nine different tours are offered at the renowned Kozlović winery, north-east of Buje past Momjan. A family business since 1904, the current Kozlović operation consists of two expansive vineyard areas, one at

Valle by the main site, the other, Santa Lucia near Buje. Here teran, malvazia, muškat momjanski and other indigenous varieties are cultivated and hand-picked every harvest, available for sampling as part of a guided visit. Year-round tours include a two-hour presentation, partly in the old cellar from 1904, with finger food, and a one-hour sampling of classic Istrian wines, grappas and olive oils in the company's smart wine bar. In

summer, you can opt for a private rooftop dinner à deux, with wine, timed just before sunset, or a picnic at the Santa Lucia vineyard.

→ Vale 78, Momjan (052 779 177, kozlovic.hr)

### 9 Dine in plain countryside

One of the best, if not the best, countryside restaurants, Konoba Morgan is easy to find – if you're one of the many Italian regulars who beat a path to its door at weekends.



Hotel San Rocco Wellness



For first-time visitors, it's not that well signposted – to reach it, take the main road out of Buje, then a track on the left-hand side a kilometre before Brtonigla. Make sure to book a table first, though, ideally on the large covered terrace with a view of the vines. Owner Marko Morgan lets locally sourced ingredients and attention to detail take centre stage, to produce simple dishes based on authentic recipes. The business involves the whole family: Morgan senior hunts for game, his mother and sister work in the kitchen. There's no fixed menu; Morgan relays to customers what is available that day and invites them to take an aperitif. Time-tested specialities are based on the season – homemade polenta with game perhaps or slow-cooked and marinated boškarin ox. → Bracanjia 1, Buje (052 774 520, konobamorgan.eu).

**10 Soak in a beer spa**  
A cult beer for a decade or more, San Servolo has put the profits to good use, not by opening yet another craft-ale bar, but by creating a boutique hotel and beer spa just outside Buje. Along with contemporary, four-star lodgings, you can soak away your aches and pains in a beer bath. The treatment lasts for 45 minutes and also includes use of a heated indoor pool, Finnish and Turkish saunas, and the gym. The steakhouse features the finest Istrian boškarin ox, lamb and prosciutto, partaken with a full view of the surrounding Istrian countryside. → Momjanska ulica 7, Buje (052 772 505, 091 477 2400, sanservoloresort.com)

**11 Sample local Muscat**  
Momjan is the historic heartland of Muscat wine. Golden in colour, muškato momjanski has been produced in and around this hilltop village near Buje for centuries. A particularly fine accompaniment for dessert, this local variety is celebrated every November for the fortnight-long Muscat and Truffle Days gastronomic festival in Momjan. Year-round, wineries such as Kozlović lay on tours and sampling sessions for visitors.

**12 Observe art in a medieval tower**  
Built by the Venetians in the 1400s, St Martin's Tower

is all that remains of Buje's fortifications, the rest of the stronghold otherwise abandoned or destroyed. Itself on the point of collapse, this pentagonal landmark was given a complete renovation in 2015 and now is not only safe to walk around in, but entertaining, too. Amid brickwork nearly 600 years old, art exhibitions are displayed, taken advantage of the tower's atmospheric surroundings and ideal location.

**13 Hang out with the beautiful people at Gecco**  
Gecco Beach Club is more than just another another waterfront spot with a few mixed drinks and DJ tunes. Here, at the lesser-known resort of Karigador, a short drive from Brtonigla, you can start the day with sunrise yoga, try your hand at a little beach volleyball before settling down to lunch, perhaps some miso soup, pad Thai noodles, or spicy tom yum. The afternoon can be given over to swimming and sunbathing, before it's time for an apéritif, and maybe a cocktail or two. By sunset, DJs are in full swing. Operating daily until 2am for six months of the year, Gecco is best known for its

Sunday champagne brunches, a popular feature on this part of the Istrian coastline.

→ Karigador 74B (091 919 4900, gecco.pro)

**14 Combine a gallery visit with a picnic**  
Though born in Zagreb, renowned sculptor Aleksandar Rukavina was rooted to Istria, living and working here for the last 25 years of his life before he passed away in 1985. His memorial gallery in bucolic Brtonigla is not only filled with 47 of his works in wood, stone and bronze, but is set in a shaded park, where you can spread out the picnic blanket after you finish at the museum. Rukavina taught art in Buje and Brtonigla, initiated many cultural projects and was dedicated to restoring neglected Istrian villages to their former glory. Peasants, and soldiers, feature heavily in the works on view at the gallery. → Aleksandra Rukavine 9, Brtonigla (052 774 307)

**15 Visit a farm and have lunch**  
Just off the main road to Buje, the village-based family operation Konoba Nono is both farm and eatery. First

and foremost, it's an ideal place to tuck in to the rural Istrian repertoire of home-made pasta, meats baked under a hot metal lid (including goat), and goulash made from boškarin, the local horned cattle. The wine list runs from an unpretentious house white to the best of local small winery production. Modern dining rooms feature rustic implements and old musical instruments. Meanwhile, alongside, the kids can visit the owners' farm, with its donkeys, sheep, geese, ducks, chickens and rabbits.

→ Umaška 35, Petrovlja (052 740 160, konoba-nono.com)

**16 Visit the Lourdes of Istria**  
France has Lourdes, where peasant girl Bernadette Soubirous saw her visions in 1858 – Istria has Radini. In this pretty village between Brtonigla, Karigador and the Adriatic, a certain Marina Pirović also saw the Virgin Mary, in 1922, and eventually persuaded the powerful local Radin family to assist her in building a church as a result of this miracle. Providing a small plot by the main square, and stone from their own quarry, the Radins enlisted the help of many



Truffle omelette

volunteers to construct Marina's church. The huge altar would be designed in the same shape as the cave at Lourdes where the famous visions took place. Sure enough, in July 1929, the church was ready, opened and consecrated – and every July since, greets local worshippers who gather for a special Mass and ceremony to honour Our Lady of Lourdes.

**17 Buy top truffles**  
The Buje outlet of the legendary Zigante brand is one of half-a-dozen stores across Istria and Slovenia, ample proof of the success of this Livade-based operation. In the late 1990s, a certain Giancarlo Zigante and his dog Diana found the largest white truffle in history, a discovery that led to a destination restaurant, a large processing and canning factory, and all kinds of offshoots. Cornering the market in truffle dining, Zigante is a significant local industry based around this forest fungus. At this store, truffles come in all forms, black, white, in honey, in olive oil, in cheese, in dark chocolate and in jam. The latest brand-stretcher? Truffle crisps. → Trg Josipa Broza Tita 10, Buje (052 772 125, ziganetetartufi.com)

**18 Dine in a historic distillery**  
One of those places that's highly regarded by locals and well worth driving a few extra kilometres to find, the Stari Podrum is situated in an old red-brick distillery in Momjan, a wine-producing village just north-east of Buje. The food is as off-the-beaten-track as the location, with an informal follow-the-staff-suggestions menu that changes seasonally according to what's fresh. Expect good home cooking with home-made pasta, soups and stews garnished with truffles, asparagus

and other regional riches. Be sure to stay for the seasonal fruit desserts, washed down with the local Muscat. → Most 52, Merišće, Momjan (052 779 152, staripodrum.info)

**19 Admire the works of Venetian master craftsmen**  
Visit the Church of San Rocco in Venice or magnificent Cathedral of St George in Ferrara, and you will see the works of master sculptor Giovanni Marchiori. Here in Istria, too, are masterpieces by Marchiori, carved from famed Carrara marble: the statues of St Sebastian and St Servulus, after whom the main church in the centre of Buje is named. Built on the site of its Gothic-Romanesque predecessor from the 1200s, this late Baroque landmark contains an organ created by Gaetano Callido. One of 430 he is said to have constructed, found in a dozen churches around Venice, this one dates back to 1791.

**20 Pick up quality olive oil**  
The red, grey and black soils in this part of Istria lend themselves to the cultivation of olives – which is where the Buršić family comes in. Based Nova Vas, near Brtonigla, this dynamic operation produces five types of olive oil, De Kleva created from five types of olives, Buza with balsamic undertones, Istrian Bjelica to go with mature cheeses, Leccino for seafood and Pendolino to accompany pasta. All are extra virgin, and all are available at this homely outlet. → Nova Vas 102 (052 774 102, bursic.net)

**Best of the rest**  
**Istarska Konoba Šantič**  
A jug and a map of Istria with a bunch of grapes superimposed over it feature beside the name

**Oštarija Rondo**  
The dining arm of the Franković winery is very impressive indeed. The Rondo relies on seasonal, locally sourced produce to bring gnocchi with boškarin or steak with porcini mushrooms to your table. Similarly, bream, bass, sole and squid do not have to travel too far before they reach the kitchen here. They're then sizzled or drizzled in the extra virgin olive oil the family also makes, another reason why the Rondo gets so much repeat custom. → Trg Josipa Broza Tita 6, Buje (052 772 898)

**Primizia Food & Wine**  
Under the same umbrella as the tip-top San Rocco hotel and restaurant the other side of Brtonigla, Primizia is unsurprisingly excellent, its pizzas and pastas made with various kinds of flour according to taste. The menu is seasonal, your fuži, pljukanci, gnocchi or tagliatelle coming with boškarin beef, black truffles or locally sourced chicken. Carnivores shouldn't miss out on the veal cooked in a wood-fired oven. Main courses can be prefaced by own-made sheep's cheese or boškarin carpaccio. Wine comes from the renowned Kozlović, Cattunar and Cuj cellars, among others. → Giuseppe trg 4, Brtonigla (052 774 704, primizia.hr)

**BEACHES**  
Though it feels very much inland, Brtonigla is under ten kilometres from the coast – and the city beach at Karigador, pretty much the first thing you come to as the road forks off to the right from the roundabout. A mix of sand, rocks and concrete boardwalk, it has a beach volleyball net, snorkelling and a couple of outlets dispensing beers and ice creams. A little further north towards Lovrečica, Kanova sports a recently relandscaped sunbathing area, close to a Blue Flag beach and stairs descending down into clear waters. Near the campsite is a sailing and windsurfing academy for children and adults, with kayaking and SUP paddle as well. Lovrečica itself has its own public beach on waterfront Slanik, light on amenities but with a number of eateries dotted close by.







# The pleasure of luxury

Recently voted 'Wellness Hotel of the Year' in Croatia, the five-star Casino Hotel Mulino on the Croatia-Slovenia border, a short drive north of Buje in Istria, attracts visitors from all over Europe seeking luxury and high-end spa treatments.

**THE SURROUNDINGS** could not be more tranquil. On the slopes overlooking the beautiful Gulf of Piran out in the Adriatic, the Casino Hotel Mulino overlooks the Piran Salt pans Nature Park. Vineyards, olive groves, orchards and historic hilltop Istrian hamlets line the landscape, the Mediterranean climate is mild and forgiving, wine cultivation and farm production the main activities in this unspoiled north-west corner of Istria with generations of Italian influence on cuisine and architecture.

The design of the Casino Hotel Mulino itself, while gleaming and contemporary, echoes the elegance of this timeless environment. Here, 67 guestrooms and luxury suites provide visitors with all they need for a relaxing getaway and come in seven categories: Presidential Suite, Suite de Luxe, Mulino Junior Suite Blue, Mulino Junior Suite Red, Junior Suite, Double

de Luxe and Single de Luxe. From the Single to the Presidential, luxury, charm and elegance underscore the ubiquitous Swarovski crystal, fine wood and soft leather. From a roomy 36 square metres to a mammoth 84, space is a given. Also universal are king-sized beds, veined marble bathrooms with underfloor heating, LED HD TVs, ultrafast WiFi, remote-controlled electronic curtains, bath tubs, bath robes, slippers, 24-hour room service and a range of exclusive natural cosmetic products in each bathroom. Striking artworks feature throughout. Some of the Double de Luxe rooms have been adapted for access for guests with reduced mobility. Exclusive customers staying in the Presidential Suite and Suite de Luxe have their own whirlpool while sea views can also be enjoyed

by those in the Mulino Junior Suite Blue. Guests in the Mulino Junior Suite Red look out over a verdant expanse of nature park. At guests' disposal, from noon until 1am every day of the week, are the Restaurant Mulino and Restaurant Tropicana. With glittering crystal and silverware, an exclusive ambience envelops sophisticated diners treated to Mediterranean cuisine and Istrian delicacies in the à la carte Restaurant Mulino. Truffles, fresh seafood, succulent meat and produce in season are the cornerstones of the gastronomy on offer here. Those booking the refined Restaurant Tropicana can tuck into fine regional fare in intimate surroundings, with family, friends and business clients, backdropped by views of the Sečovlje salt pans and Nature Park. Peace, tranquillity and soft lighting imbue the extensive Prestige Wellness & Spa, 1,500

square metres given over to health, relaxation and beautification. Centrepiece by a kidney-shaped pool with hydro-massage jets, a Turkish bath, Roman sauna and Finnish sauna allow you to let yourself drift away in the lap of warming luxury. Surrounded by snug loungers, with emotion showers and a help-yourself selection of fruit, soft drinks and special teas, guests may also take advantage of the panoramic pool outside and well-equipped gym. Those keen on extra pampering can book a massage or beautification treatment using exclusive Guinot, Thalion or Natura Bisse products. The Casino Hotel Mulino is, naturally, also a casino, with 20 gaming tables and 260 slot machines, a 24/7 world of bright lights and spinning wheels. As well as American roulette, you can try your luck at punto banco, Texas hold'em, blackjack, Russian poker and Mulino's own hold'em poker. Palm trees outside even offer that Las Vegas touch. For those opting to fly here, there's a major international airport at Trieste a short drive away.

**Casino Hotel Mulino**  
→ Škrle 75A, Plovanija (052 725 300, mulino.hr)



# Pazin & Žminj Top 20

Pazin, featuring a castle constructed in 983, is the chief locale among a lovely grouping of towns that includes Žminj.

**ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE** for Istria, Pazin has a bus and a train station, banks, the state archive, a courthouse, and a post office. For those not here on bureaucratic business, its main attraction is its historic castle, set dramatically atop an abyss, inspiring Jules Verne to set one of his novels there. Today Pazin Castle houses two museums. Four main roads feed into Pazin, making it a handy base for exploring nearby cultural and historic attractions, such as the church frescoes of Žminj.

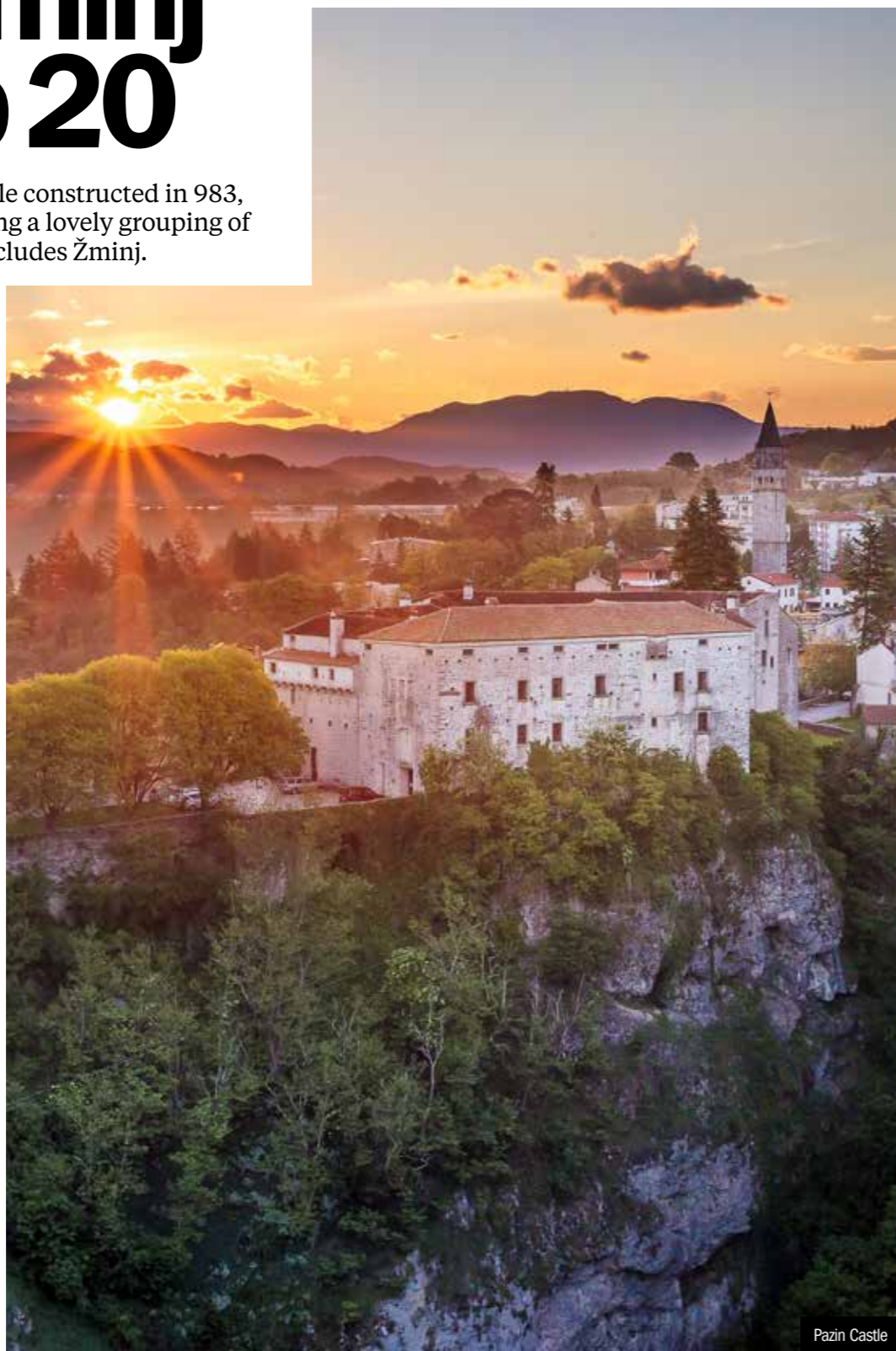
## 1 Visit a castle of Jules Verne legend

First mentioned in 983, Pazin Castle was acquired by the Habsburgs then owned by the Montecuccoli family from Modena until World War II. During that time, it was a seat of government, a residence and a prison but, most of all, was used by French writer Jules Verne as the setting for his adventure story Mathias Sandorf. Verne never visited Pazin but wrote to the town mayor to ask him for a description. Now in state hands, Pazin Castle houses the City Museum and Ethnographic Museum of Istria but many visit for its dramatic setting, above a steep abyss, as so painstakingly described by Verne himself.

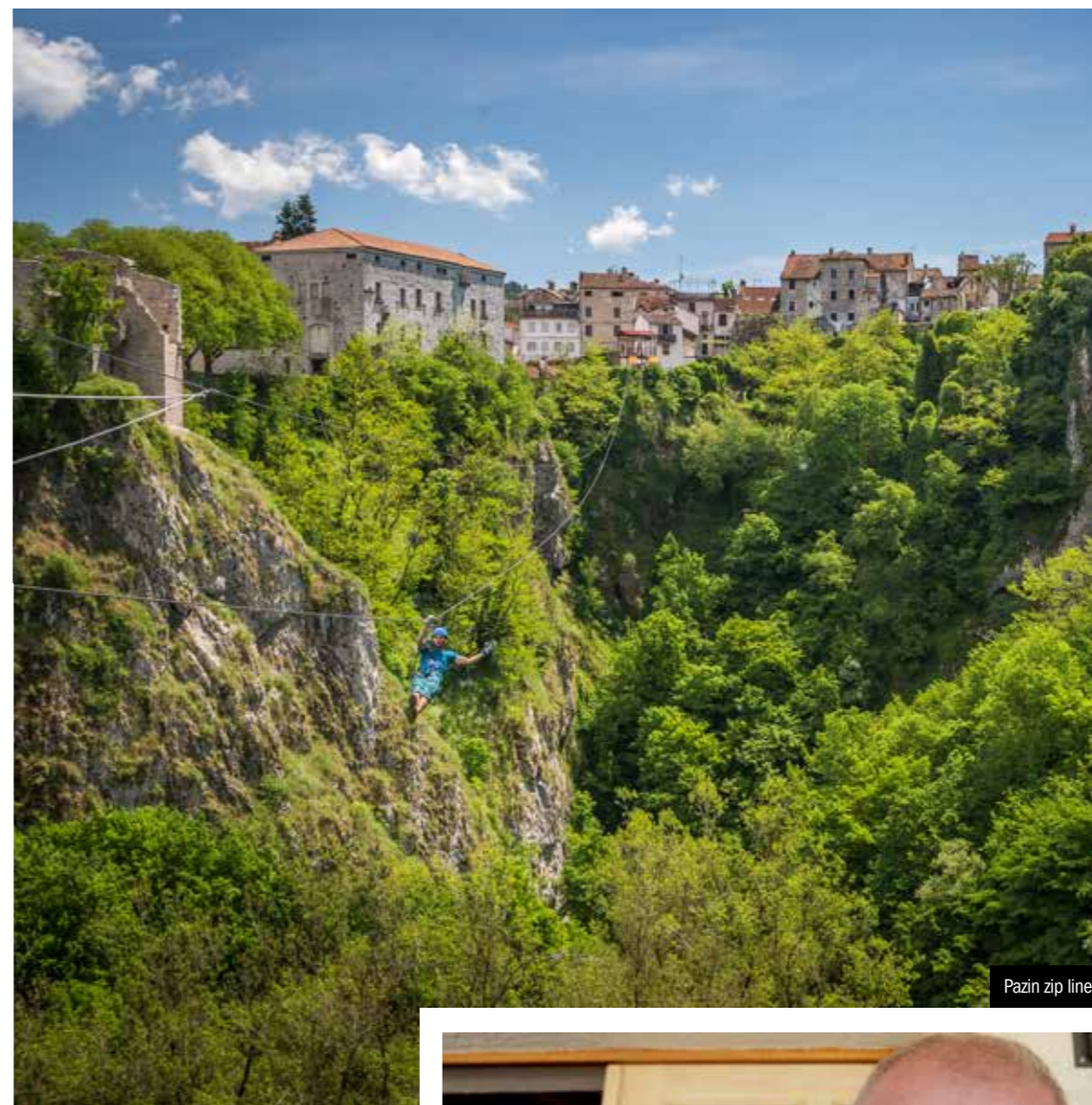
→ Trg Istarskog razvoda 1, Pazin (052 623 054,

## 2 Dine where locals do

One of the many attractions of this lesser-visited central region of Istria is the fact that it isn't swamped by tourists, not even in high season. Therefore, a quality local eatery such as the Konoba Puli Pineta, a slight trek from a



Pazin Castle



Pazin zip line

town as modest Žminj, is just the kind of place where locals gather. Tucked away amid greenery, the Puli Pineta serves top-notch ombolo (Istrian pork), steak and goulash with pasta – you're inland, so not much by way of seafood. The place opens up late afternoon, so tends to be pretty buzzy by early evening.

→ Karlovrt, Žminj (098 991 1795)

## 3 Zip over the Pazin abyss

From outside the Hotel Lovac behind Pazin Castle, a zip line runs for over half a kilometre over the yawning chasm and medieval fortress that comprise the most dramatic landmark in central Istria. Those who may be a bit tentative about putting their lives in the hands of a length of wire can try out the first two sections, each 80 metres long, which prepare the more adventurous for

## Pazin & Žminj Top 20

the full yahoo in two more sections of around 250 metres each. The maximum gradient is on the third part, when you'll be flying over the sheer drop at a speed of around 50kph. The end point is atop Pazin cave, itself a panoramic viewpoint. This attraction runs from May to September, 10am-7pm – the rest of the year, it's group visits only.

→ Šime Kurelića 4 (091 543 7718)

## 4 Devour divine meat

On the beaten path but off googlemaps – Slokovići is on the local Ž5190 road that links Maršeti with Trošti south of Pazin – Crni Dimnjak is one of those classic Balkan grill spots that most carnivores can only dream about. Top-notch čevapi and pljeskavica are served on authentic flatbread in the classic way, with a side of chopped onions and ajvar tomato-and-pepper sauce, plus a goodly portion of fries. 'Served', actually, is doing the friendly welcome and presentation a disservice, for the couple running the place prepare and offer everything with love, even though it would be a physical impossibility for any guest to spend more than 100 kuna a head. Try and get a sturdy table outside and take in the bucolic surroundings.

→ Slokovići 82F (091 601 0400)



Konoba Puli Pineta

## Pazin & Žminj Top 20

### 5 Find a music festival of your choice

Many Istrian communities put on an annual event or two, invariably focused on wine or truffles, possibly prosciutto or even asparagus. But this part of Istria goes in for instruments – one hilltop village might invite all the region's double-bass players for the day, another, accordionists. Zabrežani, on the old road that links Pazin to Žminj, usually attracts few tourists but come here during the first weekend in August and you'll see accordion players wandering around the place, squeezing out traditional tunes. Pazin itself has its Brass Bands of Istria event in May. Not wishing to be left out, Grašišće celebrates the harmonica with its Zasopimo na Organic day every May. 'Let's Play the Harmonica' also brings exponents of other instruments together by way of harmonica accompaniment. Come to Dragučin in June and you'll see musicians lugging around their double-bass from group to group, eager to participate in the Bajsi u Draguču festival.

### 6 Follow the Trail of Waterfalls

For a serious cycle tour embellished by streams, lakes and waterfalls, a four-hour circular route has been worked out with Pazin as the start and end points. En route, there are quite a few steep climbs and descents, so younger and less fit cyclists might be advised to tackle a gentler track. The so-called Trail of Waterfalls takes in the villages of Beram, Grdoselo and Cerovlje on partly asphalted roads before you're rewarded for your travails by the Zarečki waterfall, actually a ten-metre-high drop from cave to lake, a popular spot in summer. From there, you're in the home straight back to Pazin. The main cycle rental centre, Zoe Bike (zoebike.hr), is nearby or many rural lodgings allow you borrowed use of two wheels.

→ [istria-bike.com/en](http://istria-bike.com/en)

### 7 Start the day with prime coffee in Pazin

Marko Bačić opened the Epolon Caffe Bar in 2013 after successfully running Pazin's other two main cafés, the Kolodvor and the Stari Pazin. Here, in the Pazin Memorial House, a fully working theatre, the accent is on top quality. Coffee comes courtesy of Primo

Aroma, from just over the border in Trieste, its Romantica brand a mix of 70% Arabica beans. Given its late opening hours – until 11pm during the week, until 1am at weekends – the Epolon transforms into a cocktail spot after dark, high-end spirits brought to the fore.

→ Šetalište pazinske gimnazije, Pazin (091 234 5195, [epolon-pazin.com](http://epolon-pazin.com))

### 8 Come to prosciutto country

West of Pazin, Tinjan has been declared the Town of Pršut, so deeply is this community interwoven with trade in fine smoked ham. Don't expect to find shops on every corner, for Tinjan is only the main village of eight smaller hamlets, each with a population of a hundred or so people. But pršut producers abound – just look at the labels if you pop into Konoba Đidi (Tinjan 17) or, just outside Tinjan in Mlinki, Konoba na Kapeli. Every October, Tinjan hosts the two-day International Prosciutto Fair, inviting producers from as far as Spain, with live music and family-friendly entertainment set up in a large marquee.

→ [isap.hr](http://isap.hr)

### 9 Admire the frescoes of Žminj

Today, Žminj is a modest Istrian town of some 3,500 people, its importance overshadowed by the administrative capital of Pazin 15km away. Yet it wasn't always this way. Frequently attacked by the Venetians, Žminj was never ruled from Venice for any significant length of time. Locals took solace and expressed gratitude in decorating their churches in beautiful frescoes – murals you can still see today. The biblical scenes depicted in the Holy Trinity Church, such as the Flight to Egypt, the Last Supper and the Ascension, date back to 1471 although we are not sure of the artist responsible. Experts point to Master Bolfgang of Carinthia, whose other works include likenesses of the Virgin Mary in the Church of the Mother of God on an island in Lake Bled, Slovenia. Those in the Church of St Anthony date back even further, to 1381, and have a more Venetian influence. Note also the graffiti in Glagolitic, the ancient Slav language once prominent in these parts. St Bartholomew's packs every August with the mass preceding the major communal



feast, surrounded by the frescoes also created in the 1500s.

### 10 Bask in bucolic Beram

Just outside the Konoba Vela Vrata, a pretty traditional tavern in the hilltop hamlet of Beram outside Pazin, a terrace table provides the perfect view of the undulating countryside of central Istria. True, you can enjoy your classic regional dish – fuži pasta twists with goulash, pasta with truffles, ombolo pork – within the stone interior. In the colder months, given the roaring fire, this would be the best option. But dining outside of a spring lunch-time or summer's eve is one of those unrepeatable Istrian experiences of unspoiled scenery, quality cuisine and fine wine. Plus a barbecue grill is set up outside in high season.

→ Beram 39 (052 622 801)

### 11 Take the train to the smallest town in the world

Hum likes to call itself 'The Smallest Town in the World', though whether a hilltop settlement of 21 people counts as a town is another matter. With or without the epithet, Hum preserves its thousand-year culture within its medieval walls. Hum is also one of a handful of stations on the railway line that runs from Lupoglav to Pula, via Pazin. The journey between Pazin and Hum is 20 minutes, and although Hum station is a fair trek from the town itself, it's worth it for the tranquillity both the train and hike offer. Once you reach Hum, have a look out for inscriptions in Glagolitic, the oldest known Slavic language, created by St Cyril of Cyrillic fame.



### 12 Sample outstanding Malvasia wine

Just outside Pazin in the settlement of Lovrin, the Gortan family winery has been making top-quality, golden malvasia for decades. The Malvasia of the Pazin region has a more flowery texture than its many counterparts around Istria. Starting with only 1,500 vines, the Gortans have expanded to now cultivate some 50,000 vines over an area of 15 hectares, opening a tasting room for visitors in 2016. Guests are given a tour of the vineyard and cellar. The Gortans also produce merlot and cabernet sauvignon if you prefer red to white.

→ Lovrin (099 437 9618, [vina-gortan.hr](http://vina-gortan.hr))

### 13 Stay true to tradition

The entire village under heritage protection, Grašišće is where to come if you fancy leaving



## Pazin & Žminj Top 20

the modern world behind for a day or two. Tucked inside the stone gate that leads up to the tranquil community of 400 or so souls, Konoba Marino serves Istrian cuisine made according to age-old recipes. The maneštra soup warms on colder days – Grašišće even holds a maneštra festival every year. Ravioli filled with game is a house speciality, there's prosciutto ham, of course, Istrian sausage and goats' cheese, and lashings of excellent domestic wine of both colours. Fruit grappa, perhaps honey- or mistletoe-flavoured, bookends your meal nicely and if you overdo it, the family can rent you one of the rooms upstairs.

→ Grašišće 75 (052 687 081, konoba-marino-gracisce.hr)

## 14 Observe the Dance of the Dead

Of all the churches in central Istria, the one with the most impressive artwork stands a kilometre outside Beram, itself

about six kilometres from Pazin. From the outside, the Church of Our Lady on the Rocks makes you wonder why you made such a



Castle Belaj

long trek to find it, a small temple hidden amid the woods. Step inside though – having phoned ahead to pick up the key – and the reason for your visit becomes clear. Covering almost the entire space of the interior are late medieval frescoes so detailed, they take your breath away. The works by local artist Vincent of Kastav, dating to the 1400s, depict scenes of Mary and Jesus plus, most of all, a piece called Dance of the Dead in which merchants, kings and cardinals are led to meet their maker. At some point in the 18th century, these works were covered over, only to be rediscovered and renovated in 1913.

→ Beram 83 (091 580 6083)

## 15 Bake your own Pazinski cukerančić

Every Croatian region has its own traditional sweets and pastries. In Pazin, it's Pazinski cukerančić, a sugary delight fashioned in a leaf-like shape, often dipped in home-made brandy to give each one a little kick. At weddings, communions and family celebrations, there are bound to be plates of Pazinski cukerančić on the buffet table. To sample them, buy a small bag from authentic local bakery Antica, at ulica Franine i Jurine 2B between Sv Nikola Church and the Town Hall. Alternatively, one of several culinary workshops held at rural lodging Ograde, about halfway between Pazin and Žminj, instructs visitors in the age-old

art of Pazinski cukerančić-making. As the family here is also adept at distilling its own brandy from figs, mistletoe or even local grass, the pastries should not lack for rakija.

→ Ograde, Lindarski katun 60, Pazin (052 693 035, agroturizam-ograde.hr/en)

## 16 Wine and dine in a 16th-century castle

The noble Barbo dynasty built Belaj Castle in the late 1500s, halfway between Pazin and Učka. But it was when the property was under the ownership arrival of the Habsburg von Auerspergs between the mid-1600s and mid-1800s that Beraj developed as a wine-growing estate. The clan not only converted the stronghold into the courthouse for the region, but cultivated the fertile land around it, then delivering the wine all the way to Vienna. This historic vineyard, still in operation today, comprises some 11 hectares. Here, the Podrum Belaj winery has been a modern-day concern since 1998 – it also makes grappa and honey – while the award-winning Dvorac Belaj winery has been catering to the upper end of the market since 2011. The restaurant uses as many Istrian specialities as possible, such as boškarin beef, black truffles and Istrian sausage. The dining rooms, park and inner courtyard are often hired out for weddings and social events, so do book well in advance.

→ Belaj 20A, Cerovlje (052 524 315, castlebelaj.com)

## 17 See how generations of Istrians lived

Occupying two floors of Pazin Castle, the Ethnographic Museum of Istria shows the realities of rural and town life in the region from around the 19th century onwards. More than 7,000 textiles and objects used in agriculture, crafts and cuisine are on display, with focus on specific vocations such as wine-growing, fishing and pottery. Though you'll probably no longer see the women of Peroj, near Fažana, wearing these traditional Montenegrin costumes except on feast days, what is remarkable is how close Istria remains to this way of life. The price of admission includes entry to the Pazin City Museum within the same building, with its collection of church bells and early medieval pottery.

→ Trg Istarskog razvoda 1, Pazin (052 622 220, emi.hr)

## 18 Watch out for vampires

Pity poor Jure Grando. One night in 1672, the good villagers of Kringa, near Tinjan, drove a stake through his body then continued to hound his poor widow, in the perhaps mistaken belief that her husband was a vampire. Some 350 years on, the Vampire Bar in Kringa, a short drive west of Pazin or Žminj, plays on this local legend. Blood-coloured decor and cocktails, spooky music and playful staff add to the illusion – and everyone pulls out all the stops for Halloween.

→ Kringa 32

## 19 Explore Grašišće

Once known as Gallignana, possibly because of the Gauls who settled here before even Charlemagne was ruler in the 700s, Grašišće looks little different to when Napoleon briefly took over 1,000 or so years later. Each of its many churches centrepiece its many squares, each integral to what were separate districts. St Euphemia was built in 1383 and features a large crucifix dating back even earlier. The Church of the Mother of God at the Square contains frescoes dating back to the 1400s. Behind it are the Gothic remains of the summer residence of the bishops of nearby Pićan. During the year, several festivals attract visitors, the most unusual being Harmonica Day

in May, when musicians gather to blast out a few tunes. Wine and maneštra soup are also celebrated on certain days of the year.

## 20 Browse Pazin market

In a tradition dating

back to 1574, on the first Tuesday in every month, alongside the recreation area now referred to as Park narodnog ustanka, vendors set up stalls in the heart of Pazin to offer all kinds of produce, ornaments, artefacts and knickknacks. Originally, Pazinski

samanj was agricultural in nature, a chance for farmers to trade or exchange rural tools – you may even find a few being sold here. But most of all, you'll find pottery, paintings, jewellery, decorative homeware, old furniture and textiles.



Pazinski cukerančić



Grašišće

# Labin & Rabac Top 20

The only major town on Istria's wild east coast, Labin is strong on culture while Rabac provides the summer fun.

**LABIN IS A LAW** unto itself. Sited on a high peak, three kilometres from the sea, Labin was christened 'Albona' ('Town on a Hill') by ancient Celts and this ancient name is still in use. Today it's a town of artists and galleries. Nearby Rabac is about summer fun. Its steep hillside is crowded with pretty holiday homes, complemented all-in resort hotels and access to a Blue Flag beach.

## 1 Wander around 2,000 years of history

In the Baroque Battiala-Lazzarini palace dating back to the late 1600s, the Labin City Museum takes you on a journey of 2,000 years. Starting with the atrium display of Roman tombstones and monuments from the first to the third centuries – note the mention of 'Respublica Albonessium' on one dating back to 245 AD – the

permanent exhibition covers the Venetian, Napoleonic and Habsburg periods. A user-friendly chronological overview includes interactive features, a replica of a local coalmine and documentation in English. There's particular focus on the miners' striker of 1921, World War II and the modern-day annual cultural happening of Labin Art Republic.

→ Ulica 1.svibnja 6, Labin (052 852 477, [hvm.mdc.hr](http://hvm.mdc.hr))

## 2 Dine with a magnificent view

A superb panorama of the Kvarner Bay, all the way out to the island of Cres, is not the only reason to visit revered Restaurant Kvarner – but all the same you'll want to find a table on the 60-person terrace. The Istrian specialities here would be worth the visit whatever the view. Pride of place goes to the kرافي, ravioli-shaped pasta sweetened with raisins, rum and sugar and stuffed with four types of local cheese. Fuži pasta twists with beef – dry-aged meat is another speciality – and gnocchi with wild boar can also be recommended. Much of the produce is sourced locally,

including the divine olive oil and wine. Don't worry if you linger longer than expected – the management also looks after four guestrooms in Labin and four in Rabac.

→ Šetalište San Marco, Labin (052 852 336, [kvarnerlabin.com](http://kvarnerlabin.com))

## 3 Visit a church gallery

It was Pula-born painter Vinko Šaina who hit upon the idea of reviving the tiny Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, halfway up an incline on a steep Labin street, by converting into an art gallery. That was back in 1991. After two years of painstaking repair and restoration, working alongside experts in architectural heritage, Šaina was able to open the Galerija Alvona, one of the most prominent in eastern Istria. Certainly, it has since hosted some 100 exhibitions by mainly, but not exclusively, Croatian artists, as well as collaborations from nearby Italy and Austria. Although the Alvona does not insist on a specific artistic direction, exhibitions have to work around a tight space of five by six metres, albeit one equipped with gallery lighting.

→ G Martinuzzi 15, Labin (052 852 082, [galerija-alvona.hr](http://galerija-alvona.hr))



## 4 Meet a friend of Martin Luther

Controversial German cleric Martin Luther, whose teachings divided Christianity in the early 1500s, had many followers. One of the most notable was Labin-born Matthias Flacius Illyricus, whose writings are kept as part of a unique collection in palatial surroundings

by the Labin City Museum. Visitors may admire the dense, erudite volumes in Latin, revolutionary at the time, in the house where this Protestant writer and professor of theology grew up. This memorial collection has longer opening hours in high season.

→ Giuseppina Martinuzzi 7, Labin (052 852 477, [flacius.org](http://flacius.org))

## 5 Follow the asparagus trail

The lesser-known smaller settlements of Plomin, Kršan, Vozilići and Potpićan lie north of Labin and Rabac, close to the tip of Kvarner. Hilltop Plomin is particularly picturesque, overlooking a channel that cuts into Istria's east coast. Every

## Labin & Rabac Top 20

spring, key restaurants in these communities take advantage of the plethora of wild asparagus that grows naturally in the verdant surroundings. Each prepares special dishes, but most will offer the local favourite, asparagus omelette. Establishments include the Konoba Stare Staze in Kršan, the Tri Murve in Vozilići and the Dorina in Plomin.

## 6 Discover Labin at night

Thanks to a popular initiative, visitors to Labin between mid-June and mid-September can enjoy a free five-language sightseeing tour of the town, led by a local guide. Medieval secrets and legends, the mining industry and the legacy of the Labin Republic are explained as the group is taken round the streets, sights and Baroque palaces of the historic centre. Tours take place every Tuesday in summer, between 9.30pm and 11pm, bookended by sampling of local produce at the Art Gastro Gallery at the Palazzo Negri.

→ [rabac-labin.com](http://rabac-labin.com)

## 7 Savour sea bass on Tito Square

Its prominent, two-storey façade sat on Titov trg – yes, Labin still has a Titov trg – Velo Kafe is one of those places that is all things to all men. Three venues fill this Italianate building, all of them busy, all year round. On an upper floor with a view of the main square, a comfortable, half-trendy, half-rustic restaurant boasts glowing terracotta walls, plenty of artwork and a traditional open fire in winter. The food is typical Istrian with plenty of maritime options, not least the sea bass in a sauce of capers, olives and white wine, and outstanding Kvarner prawns. The café and its terrace throng in summer while a nightspot offers rock music to regulars.

→ Titov trg 12, Labin (052 852 745, [velokafe.com](http://velokafe.com))

## 8 Discover the great outdoors

Cutting across the bucolic countryside surrounding Labin are a number of hiking and cycling trails, named after a certain landmark or legend. Each has a specific length, degree of difficulty and GPS coding to help you along the way and plan your day. A trail could be 15km long, the Bellavista,





Gradska galerija



DISCOVER

RABAC

where the hills meet the sea

say, taking between four and five hours by bike – or under 4km, the St Florentius, a nice half-hour jaunt. Outdoor activities are not limited to the land – in addition, there’s diving at the Girandella centre, sea kayaking through Four Elements, both Rabac-based, and plenty of nearby opportunities for SUP and sailing.

→ [istria-trails.com](http://istria-trails.com); [girandella-diving.com](http://girandella-diving.com); [fourelements.com.hr](http://fourelements.com.hr)

## 10 Swim, dine and sleep in Rogočana

A short drive south of Labin, Rogočana (population: 88) is a sleepy Istrian hamlet whose various accommodation options allow you to explore the verdant interior of south-east Istria. One

such is the Konoba Rogočana itself, not only a traditional restaurant but a comfortable, mid-range lodging with an outdoor pool. With the tavern-like eatery keeping evening hours only, this allows you to swim as the sun sets then settle down to a fine helping of fresh fish or the

house meat platter of home-made sausage and stuffed turkey. Tables spread over the terrace, so the whole dining experience can be enjoyed outdoors or near a warming fireplace indoors in winter.

→ Rogočana 1 (052 852 576, [konobarogocana.com](http://konobarogocana.com))



Konoba Rogočana

## 9 Explore a ghostly local past

Under a kilometre from the crowds on Maslinica beach and nearby campsite in Rabac, a ghostly sight welcomes anyone who decides to take a relatively short stroll along the coast. A busy terminal between 1925 and World War II, the Teleferika was a cable car that served the local bauxite industry. Running the whole nine kilometres from the village of Cere, where the quarry was located, the line delivered the goods directly to the ships waiting here in the bay. Today the ruins of the buildings here still remain for the curious visitor to explore. The view over the waves and of Rabac beyond is sublime – though the cable car has long been out of operation.





Atelier and Gallery Vinko Šaina

## 11 Relive Raša's mining history

There's nothing quite like Raša – certainly not in Croatia. A former mining community whose feisty strike in 1921 gave rise to the so-called Labin Republic, Raša was deliberately chosen by Il Duce to site his model new town in what was then Italian-occupied territory. This classic architecture of the time remains in place, while Raša has since rediscovered its industrial heritage. By using video projections and sound effects, the Museum of Mining at the Arsia Centre evokes the authentic experience of how life was for those who worked here. There are even the original rail tracks and a mock-up of the typical modest lodging where a miner and his family used to live. The whole attraction has also been adapted to accommodate visitors with limited mobility.

→ Trg Republike, Raša

## 12 Admire four decades of modern sculpture

Just outside Labin, once part of the estate of local nobles, Dubrova Sculpture Park displays the works created by the summer Mediterranean Sculpture Symposium here. Short-term residencies were offered to select, mainly European, sculptors, who

in turn left their works as part of the landscape. Free to enter, the sculpture park by the entrance to Labin now contains around 100 examples carved from durable Istrian stone. Look out for pieces such as King & Queen by Zvonimir Kamenar and The Breakthrough by Slovak artist Jozef Janković, whose work was exhibited at the Tate in London in 2015.

## 13 Find buried treasure in Kranjci

Local legend has it that the first church in what is today the village of Kranjci was built by Greeks in Byzantine times. After accumulating much wealth, they were struck by a terrible drought, hunger forcing them to leave. They packed all their gold in a small chariot, which proved too heavy to move. Part of it, the legend continues, was placed in a cauldron and buried near the Church of St Florentius, with a secret vow. They never returned for the gold, and the vow went with them. What we do know is that the church that centrepieces the village dates back to around 550 AD and was built in Romanesque style. It gained its patron saint 700 years later, perhaps no coincidence that Florentius guards against terrible storms and low crop yields. The walk from Labin to Kranjci is along a bucolic trail of around three kilometres – look out for buried treasure on the way.

## 14 Take a culinary trek to Trget

Trget, ranged around a beautiful bay south of Labin, is one of those authentic fishing villages that have long disappeared from much of the Mediterranean. Set at the mouth of the River Raša, it would attract few visitors – in fact, it has no lodging to accommodate any – were it not for a fabulous little fish restaurant, Martin Pescador. Fishing skiffs bob below the terrace, where the lap of the water gently competes for your attention. That is, until the food arrives, the fresh crab, calamari, spaghetti vongole, accompanied by a crisp malvasia. If dining inside, you'll be surrounded by maritime knickknacks, the drinks served from a rowing boat. Traditional furnishings encompass a fireplace that comes into its own in winter.

→ Trget 20 (052 544 976)

## 15 Take the kids to an aquapark

More soft play in the water than high-tech rides, nevertheless the two Aqua Fun sites in Rabac, at Maslinica beach and at the Valamar Girandella Resort on the other side of the headland, provide active entertainment all day long in summer. Slides, towers, climbing frames and tubes allow kids to balance, clamber and, best of all,

fall off, into clear seawater. And then go back and do the same thing all over again.

→ aquafun-turizam.hr

## 16 Sink cocktails and party in Rabac

While Labin gets arty, Rabac parties. Just in from the seafront, surrounded by resort hotels, the Movie Bar is where holidaymakers get down and fraternise. DJs spin all summer long, cocktails are dangerously affordable and most of the action takes place outside around a large clearing in the trees. There's occasionally live music too, but just to warm things up. Season-closing parties tend to be memorable. In high season, other party options include the Sundance Beach Club and, nearby, the Beat Beach Club, both along Obala Maršala Tita.

→ Maršala Tita 81, Rabac (099 508 9460, moviebar.hr); facebook.com/Sundance.Beach.Club; facebook.com/TheBeatBeachClubRabac

## 17 Uncover 500 years of family history

The Baroque Palazzo Negri in Labin's Old Town, once belonged to the noble family of the same name who moved here from the vicinity of Bergamo. First came banker and businessman Giovanni Antonio, the Negris enjoying the privileges and affection afforded them by the local Venetian rulers. The family then became involved in timber, then agricultural products, hunting and fishing. By the end of the 16th and early 17th centuries, its members owned nine townhouses, three mills and several smaller estates. In time, the palace would house a hospital, then a nursery, then a school.

Today the palace is home to the Art&Gastro Gallery Negri, run by top local olive farmer William Negri and his wife, artist Anessa. Here art, local flavours and tradition intermingle – you can peruse the gallery while sampling local cheeses and prosciutto with award-winning Negri olive oil and wines, as well as Istrian biska and medica grappas. Guided tastings are available by appointment.

→ G Martinuzzi 11, Labin (052 875 280, 098 219 524, negri-olive.com)

## 18 Dine on divine seafood at Lino

Now with two restaurants on the main seafront boulevard in Rabac, ulica Maršala Tita,

Lino has based its success on simply sublime seafood. Linguini with clams, spicy lobster and oven-baked dentex with home-style potatoes, this is cuisine created with love and experience, one of the founders having spent his formative years in the kitchens of New York. The setting, too, is perfect, directly overlooking the waterfront in the case of Lino 1 at No.59. Guests at evening-only Lino 2 at No.11 are treated to an Adriatic view from the upper dining terrace.

→ Maršala Tita 11 & 59, Rabac (Lino 1 091 157 6313, Lino 2 091 197 7079, restaurant-lino.hr)

## 19 See a Victorian shipwreck

Built at a Newcastle shipyard in 1879, the Lina came to grief in the Kvarner Bay on the eve of World War I when on a journey from Cardiff to Rijeka. Even sport divers may observe the ship, set 50 metres from the shore, at least as far as the captain's cabin. More experienced divers can plunge

deeper, where schools of fish hide amid the fishing nets wrapped around the mast, and see how the rudder is wedged into the sand.

For complete beginners, Rabac-based Girandella diving centre lays on trips to the Golubiera rocks where octopi and occasionally seahorses dwell. Diving courses for all ages and levels are also given.

→ Girandella, Rabac (091 769 4015, girandella-diving.com)

## 20 Pick up some Istrian ceramics

Founded by the husband-and-wife team of Masimo and Dolores Jenkel in 1993, Merania has grown from a modest pottery workshop into a cottage industry, a Raša-based, family-run enterprise that produces creative lighting, tableware and all kinds of ornaments, even number signs for houses. Istria provides the inspiration – note the little wine jugs, bukaleta, and larger versions for pouring out

soup. Visitors may visit the main workshop or browse the shop at ulica Mate Balote 31 in Labin.

→ Krapan 1A, Raša (091 544 4918, merania.hr)

## BEST OF THE REST

### Enjoy culture alfresco in Rabac

The Rabac Open Air Festival (ROAF) involves six weeks of culture in four main categories: street performance; street music; cinema and theatre, and special events. The key here is the alfresco aspect of the whole shebang, and its random yet inclusive nature. Street performance could mean circus entertainers, it could mean people dressed up as cartoon characters. Films are family- and usually English-friendly, with top local live acts opening and closing the festival. As the curtain comes down, the stage moves to the

lighthouse by the Hotel Valamar Sanfior in Rabac.

→ rabacopenair.com/en

### Dine well in Rabac year-round

Rabac is always at its busiest in summer, its beaches, restaurants and discos buzzing through the high season. But now this seaside resort is slowly coming to life in winter too, with venues such as the family-run Nostromo staying open to offer comfortable lodging and classic Croatian cuisine, often in the form of attractive half-board deals. For those just coming here to dine, you'll be tucking into Istrian favourites – squid, sardines, pork loin – a few steps away from the Rabac seafront.

→ Obala Maršala Tita 7, Rabac (052 872 601, www.nostromo.hr)

## BEACHES

Rabac is lined with beaches – it's its raison d'être. It's also lined with hotels, so privacy will be at a premium, but if you're here with the family or after seaside fun, you've come to the right place.

Alongside the tourist complex of the same name, Girandella beach can offer water skiing, diving and all kinds of things to inflate and ride on the waves. Kept pristine, with Blue Flag status, the beach also has all the regular facilities of bars, shops and loungers to rent. It's mainly pebbles, with areas of rock and smooth concrete. To one side, the dog beach is not only where you can take your canines, but also hire kayaks and SUP paddleboards. Further over is the naturist section.

Heading back towards town, Lanterna combines a Blue Flag pebble beach for families with a natural headland for strong swimmers, the water here exceptionally clean. A lifeguard is on hand, and a buoys and a rope indicate how far out you can go. Beach bars here are a little livelier than the norm – the Movie Bar dispense cocktails until way past midnight in high season.

On the other side of the bay, Maslinica, surrounded by holiday apartments and campsites, also gears its amenities towards families, with inflatable slides for kids and various things to peddle. Its pebble shore is cleaned every day, ensuring its Blue Flag status.



Rabac carnival



**Istrian Lifestyle**

Under the sub-heading 'Handmade and Gourmet Fair', Istrian Lifestyle is a showcase for local wineries Juričić and Romeo Licul, olive-oil manufacturers Negri and Perin, Blagevica goats' cheese, truffles and Faraguna lavender makers, to offer their wares every Friday evening through the summer on the Rabac waterfront. Other artisanal goods include authentic prosciutto, yoghurt, jams, figs and cosmetics. Even if you're just browsing, it's a pleasant way to take in the sea air and sample a slice of ham or chunk of cheese.  
 → Mid June-Mid Sept. [rabac-labin.com/en](http://rabac-labin.com/en)

**Rabac Open Air Festival**

ROAF involves eleven weeks of entertainment in four main categories: street performance; street music along the promenade; cinema and theatre, and special events. The key here is the alfresco aspect of the whole shebang, and its random yet inclusive nature. Street performance could mean circus entertainers, it could mean people dressed up as cartoon characters. Films are family- and usually English-friendly, with top local live acts opening and closing the festival. At the Sundance Tribute Festival you'll be able to see some top tribute bands playing the music of popular acts such as Joe Cocker, The Beatles, Amy Winehouse, Coldplay, ABBA, Zucchero, Queen and Rolling Stones  
 → Mid June-late Aug. [rabacopenair.com/en](http://rabacopenair.com/en)

**Tuesday Night Tours**

Also part of the open-air festival at neighbouring Rabac, visitors to Labin between mid-June and mid-September can enjoy a free five-language sightseeing tour of the

# TO DO

town, led by a local guide. Medieval secrets and legends, the mining industry and the famous Labin republic are explained as the group is taken round the streets, sights and Baroque palaces of the historic centre. Tours take place every Tuesday in summer, between 9.30pm and 11pm.  
 → Mid June-Mid-September. [rabacopenair.com/en](http://rabacopenair.com/en)

**Labin Art Republic**

Every summer, the cobbled streets and traditional stone buildings of Labin are awash with culture. The Labin Art Republic festival, its name echoing proud urban history, involves exhibitions, concerts, theatre shows and all kinds of performances in galleries, churches, cultural venues and pretty much any kind of public space suitable. There's a fixed agenda but otherwise everything's pretty open – for most days in July and August, visitors can wander into an atelier, chat to the artist in question and catch an act of some kind in the evening.  
 → July-Aug. [labin-art-republika.com](http://labin-art-republika.com)

**Labin Jazz Festival**

Conveniently dovetailing with the two-month Labin Art Republic, the Labin Jazz Festival is a three-day event, taking place on consecutive evenings in the town's historic centre. At 9.30pm or 11pm or both, mainly Istrian exponents of the genre take to the stage to give a free open-air show to an audience enjoying the relaxed balmy summer vibe.  
 → Early July. [labin-art-republika.com](http://labin-art-republika.com)

**Shpeena Dox**

For three evenings in July, at a focal point in Labin Old Town known as Špina (hence 'Shpeena Dox'), a series of documentaries are screened in alfresco surroundings. Curated by a small team of Croatian professionals in the field, works of varying lengths focus on modern-day problems and situations, captured and presented by young filmmakers. Some of the films will be in English or subtitled.  
 → 3rd week of July. [shpeenadox.com/index\\_eng.html](http://shpeenadox.com/index_eng.html)

# The great outdoors

Around the historic cobbled streets of Labin and along the seafront at Rabac, events and festivals bring summer to life from June to September.

**STARTING WITH** the waterfront Istrian Lifestyle gastronomic and artisanal showcase in mid June, the calendar is packed with things to do – and all of them outdoors.

Also in mid June, Rabac Open Air Festival starts up, eleven weeks of street music, theatre, cinema, special events and open-air performances, most of them English-friendly. As part of the same event, visitors can take advantage of the free walks around Labin every Tuesday evening in summer, an English-speaking guide pointing out the historic sights

as part of each 90-minute tour.

Labin Art Republic also allows you to explore this fascinating town, by meeting artists and gallery owners, and taking in all kinds of performances over July and August. The three-day Labin Jazz Festival, with free live music, forms part of this whole event.

July's Shpeena Dox at Špina in Labin Old Town brings the cultural offerings bang up to date with screenings of contemporary documentaries focusing on modern-day situations. Again, some will be English-friendly.





## GETTING THERE AND AROUND

### By plane

Istria's only airport is at Pula (+385 52 530 105, [airport-pula.hr/en](http://airport-pula.hr/en)). Eight kilometres (five miles) north-east of the city of Pula, the airport is not served by public transport – a taxi (+385 52 223 228) costs around 150kn. Flight-time from the UK is less than three hours. National carrier Croatia Airlines flies from London Gatwick.

In season, Ryanair flies from London Stansted; Thomsonfly flies from Birmingham, Gatwick and Manchester.

Others within easy reach are at the Croatian capital Zagreb ([zagreb-airport.hr](http://zagreb-airport.hr)), Slovene capital Ljubljana ([lju-airport.si](http://lju-airport.si)), and, in Italy, Trieste ([aeroporto.fvg.it](http://aeroporto.fvg.it)) and Venice ([veniceairport.it](http://veniceairport.it)). Bus and rail transport is limited between the Italian hubs and Istria.

### By boat

Venezia Lines (+385 52 422 896, +39 041 242 2646, [venezialines.com](http://venezialines.com))

have routes to and from Venice which serve Pula, Poreč, Rovinj and Rabac. Bookings are now taken online.

Jadrolinija (+385 51 666 111, [www.jadrolinija.hr](http://www.jadrolinija.hr)) is Croatia's national ferry outfit and links Istria to the Croatian coast via their base at nearby Rijeka. In season, a frequent service connects Brestova, just north of Labin with Cres. Foot-passenger fares are laughably cheap: Brestova-Cres is 17kn. Taking an average-sized car would cost 113kn – but obviously, other prices vary.

### By rail

Details on connections can be found at [www.db.de](http://www.db.de) or [www.hznet.hr](http://www.hznet.hr).

In Istria, hub stations are at Pazin (Stareh kostanji 1, +385 52 624 310); Pula (Kolodvorska 7, +385 52 541 733); and, nearby, in Rijeka (Trg kralja Tomislava 1, +385 51 213 333).

### By bus

Istria is connected on international lines and all other Croatian cities with stations

at: Pula (trg 1. istarske brigade 1, +385 52 500 012, +385 60 304 090); Rovinj (trg na lokvi 6, +385 52 811 453); Poreč (Karla Huguesa 2, +385 52 432 153); Novigrad (Murve 15, +385 52 757 660); Umag (Joakima Rakovca 11, +385 60 381 381); Labin-Rabac (Trg 2. ožujka, +385 52855 220); and Pazin (Miroslava Bulešića 2, +385 52 624 437).

The main Croatian bus company is Autotrans ([autotrans.hr](http://autotrans.hr)); Pulapromet ([pulapromet.hr](http://pulapromet.hr)) is based at Pula.

### Accident & emergency

Take out medical insurance when travelling to Croatia. The country's reciprocal agreement with the UK as part of the European Union covers only emergency treatment, and sometimes only 80% of the total cost of care. The standard of care in Croatia is good. Your best bet is to go to the local hospital or emergency unit where a duty doctor can have a look at you. Take your European Health Insurance Card with you and your passport. In the bigger towns, these centres should be able to help you:

**Poreč Health Centre**, Maura Gioseffia 2 (+385 52 451 611).  
**Pula Hospital**, Zagrebačka 30 (+385 52 376 500, [obpula.hr](http://obpula.hr)).  
**Rovinj Ambulance Emergency Ward Istarska** (+385 52 813 004).

### Drugs

Penalties for use, possession and trafficking of drugs are severe. Offenders can expect jail sentences and/or large fines.

### Electricity

Croatia uses a 220V, 50Hz voltage and two-pin plugs. Visitors from the UK require an adaptor.

### Insurance

Travellers should take out comprehensive travel insurance, especially if you are going to indulge in any risky sports – climbing, skiing, mountain biking – although be sure to check the small print first to see if such activities are covered by your policy.

### Money

The Croatian kuna (kn) is divided into 100 lipa. Coins are issued in



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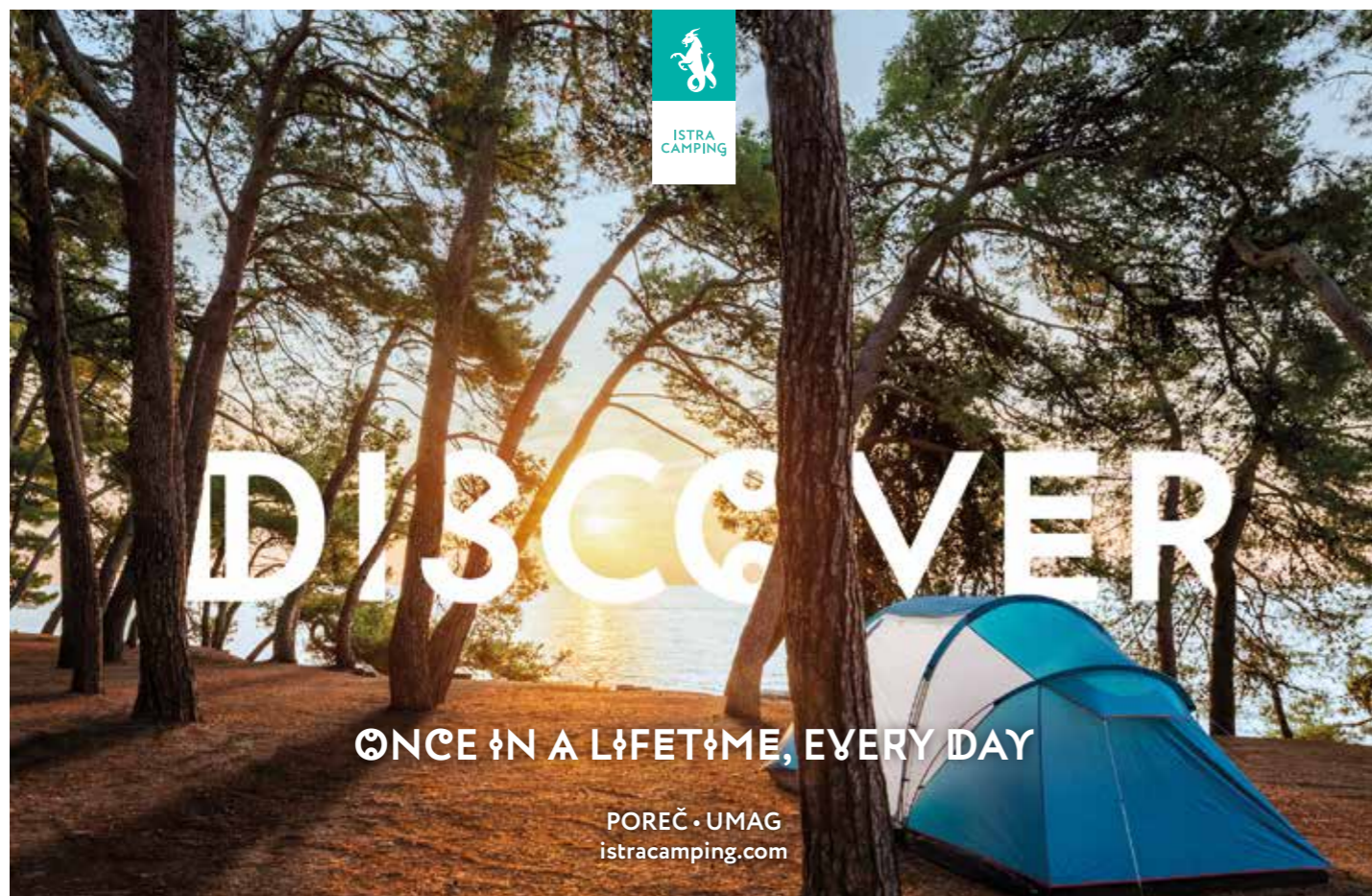
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VOCABULARY

Yes/No *da/ne*  
 Hello/good day *dobro dan*  
 Goodbye *doviđenja*  
 Hello! (familiar) *bok!*  
 Good morning *dobro jutro*  
 Good evening *dobra večer*  
 Good night  *laku noć*  
 Please *molim*  
 Great/OK *dobro*  
 Thank you (very much) *hvala (lijepo)*  
 I don't know *Ne znam*  
 Do you speak English? *Govorite li engleski?*  
 Sorry, I don't speak Croatian *oprostite, ne govorim hrvatski*  
 I don't understand *Nerazumijem*  
 What's your name? (fam/pol) *Kako se zoveš/zovete?*  
 My name is... *Zovem se...*  
 Excuse me/sorry *Oprostite*  
 Where are you from? (fam/pol) *Otkud si/ste?*  
 When? *kada?*  
 How much is it? *Koliko košta?*  
 Large *veliko*  
 Small *malo*  
 More *više*  
 Less *manje*  
 Expensive *skupo*  
 Cheap *jeftino*  
 Hot (food, drink) *toplo*  
 Cold *ladno*  
 With/without *sa/bez*  
 Open *otvoreno*  
 Closed *zatvoreno*  
 Can I book a room? *Mogu li rezervirati sobu?*  
 Where is? *Gdje je...?*  
 Where to? *Kamo?*  
 Here *ovdje*  
 There *tamo*  
 Left *lijevo*  
 Right *desno*  
 Straight on *ravno*  
 Backwards *na trag*  
 A ticket to... *Jednu kartu za...*  
 Single *u jednom pravcu*  
 Return *povratnu kartu*  
 When does the next bus/ferry/train leave for...? *Kada polazi sljedeći autobus/trajekt/vlak za...?*  
 Arrival *polazak*  
 Departure *odlazak*  
 Station *kolodvor*  
 Airport *zračna luka*  
 Port/luka, ferry terminal *trajektna luka*

**Emergency numbers**  
 In a local emergency, call 192 for the police, 193 for the fire brigade and 194 for an ambulance and ask for an English speaker.

denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 lipa and 1, 2 and 5 kn. Notes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1,000 kn.

Euros are accepted in the posher hotels and some restaurants but the currency in everyday use is the kuna.

**Opening times**

Public sector offices and most businesses usually work from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Post offices are open from 7am to 7pm, and generally close at weekends. Shops open from 8am to 8pm weekdays and until 2 or 3pm on Saturdays; in summer some stay open longer.

**Pharmacies**

Pharmacies are usually open from 8am to 7pm weekdays, and until 2pm on Saturdays. In larger towns some are open 24hrs. Prescriptions need to be paid for.

**Telephones**

The dialling code for Croatia is +385. Croatian town and city codes have a zero in front of them that must be left off when making phone calls from overseas.

When calling overseas from Croatia, the prefix 00 is the international access code.

**Tourist Information**

All cities, towns and even a number of villages have tourist information offices

An incredible amount of information can be found at [istra.hr/en/information/planning-your-travel/useful-information/important-phone-numbers](http://istra.hr/en/information/planning-your-travel/useful-information/important-phone-numbers)

There is a unique contact center for the whole of Istria:

Halo Istria Information & Reservation Center (+385 52 88 00 88, [istra.com](http://istra.com)) email: [info@istra.com](mailto:info@istra.com)

The website [www.croatia.hr](http://www.croatia.hr) is also reasonably comprehensive.

Croatian National Tourist Office (UK) The Lanchesters, 162-164 Fulham Palace Road, London W6 9ER.

Croatian National Tourist Office (USA & Canada) PO Box 2651, NY 10118 New York.

**Visas**

Visitors from the European Union, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand do not need a visa if they are staying in Croatia for less than 90 days. For longer stays, you have to contact your nearest Croatian embassy.

**Websites**

[www.croatia.hr](http://www.croatia.hr) Official tourist website - good hotel database.

[www.timeout.com/croatia](http://www.timeout.com/croatia) Regularly updated travel guides on leading Croatian destinations.

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