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Travel

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Dubrovnik Sun Gardens Resort, Croatia

Jessica Baldwin visits **Dubrovnik Sun Gardens Resort, Croatia**, which is 'less of a 'hotel' and more of a full size cliff-top village'

Posted by Jessica Baldwin on September 24, 2013

The Credentials:

Taking in the immaculate medieval fortress like city walls and the bustling old town within, it's hard to believe that just two decades ago Dubrovnik was in ruins. After a period of political struggle and shelling, this beautiful UNESCO world heritage centre has been rebuilt with the affluent tourist in mind. The vibrant city has worked its way to the top of the A-lister's to do list, with everyone from Roman Abramovich and Bill Gates to Angelina Jolie and Stephen Spielberg making a dash for its marble streets. Its narrow streets are steeped in history with intricate baroque churches, gothic statues and proud museums around every corner. In fact many say that the city feels like a living museum itself.

Dine:

Fish is the dish of the day in this seaside city. Deep pocketed visitors are spoilt for choice and there is no better time to experience Dubrovnik's culinary scene, for alongside the city's old school icons, a contemporary invasion is brewing. This was evident on our first dinner, at 360 Restaurant. The sleek modern restaurant and cocktail bar is housed inside one of the city's ancient fortresses, with commanding views across the old marina and city walls. Dishes are an intriguing juxtaposition of traditional flavours, executed with creative panache. Highlights of the evening included a deconstructed smoked tuna carbonara and a rich bone marrow risotto.

The city's most renowned fish restaurant has to be Proto, even Edward VIII and his wife Wallis Simpson dined here on their Mediterranean adventure. The relaxed rooftop terrace is the perfect place to while away an afternoon over a chilled Croatian white and a traditional fisherman's lunch.

Proto's sister restaurant, Nautika, is widely regarded as the best restaurant in Dubrovnik and its eye-wateringly expensive prices certainly set the scene. With Roger Moore and Eva Longoria leading the fan club and Condé Nast Traveller declaring it the sixth most romantic restaurant in the world – how could we resist? Located just outside the main gate in to the city, Nautika boasts undisturbed views across the Adriatic and some of the most attentive waiters in town. The menu features elegant, creative dishes using the finest local ingredients – the lobster from the isle of Vis was divine.

However, my favourite meal came courtesy of a Twitter recommendation. Ten minutes drive from the city centre lays the peaceful bay of Zaton. It is in this much bypassed bay that you can discover the relaxed waterside restaurant, Gverovic-Orsan. Almost fifty years old this hidden gem serves up fresh seafood classics right on the water's edge. We enjoyed a delicious feast of fresh anchovies, homemade olive oil, smoked tuna, tender lobster and their infamous black cuttlefish risotto, all washed down with a deliciously light local wine. Now that is what you call #perfection.

Sleep:

The five star Dubrovnik Sun Gardens resort is a picturesque fifteen minute coastal drive from the city centre (or a forty five minute boat ride), in the tranquil area of Orsac. Part of the Radisson Blu hotel group this is less of a 'hotel' and more of a full size cliff-top village, with numerous restaurants, bars, pools and an impressive spa and fitness area. Despite the sheer size of this resort the welcoming team successfully deliver great attention to detail with a friendly familiarity rarely achieved in resorts of this size.

For those that like their own space, the residences offer a comfortable stay away from the main hotel. Our one-bed residence was the perfect base with a generous balcony overlooking the sparkling Adriatic.

With families basing themselves around the children's pool Sam and I set up camp near the award-winning Spa by OCCO – think decadent double sunbeds, an empty Jacuzzi, countless heat experience rooms and a refreshing pool. As I made my way to the treatment area with a huge grin on my face I debated between a blissful massage or a much needed facial – only to find out that the dish of the day was... Electrocutation. Yes, I was booked in for their new cellulite reducing treatment: Ionithermie. Having been slathered in a mix of thermal clay and algae, electrodes were stuck on my offending areas and my charming therapist began almost an hour of repeated electrocution. My thighs felt as though they were being attacked with needles, my stomach felt like it was having extra terrestrial contractions and my derriere... Worryingly it didn't feel a thing. It may have been an hour of torture but my legs felt instantly more toned and boy did I appreciate the massage that followed. True spa-trekkers should check out their new week-long detox package.

Who Goes There?:

Everyone who is anyone is flocking to Dubrovnik right now. This historic city is hotly tipped as one of the fastest growing tourist destinations – so what are you waiting for, just a two and a half hour flight makes this city the perfect weekend break.

Out & About:

A visit to the old town goes without saying, but save your trip for early evening when the hordes of tourists from the enormous cruise ships sail in to the distance and the streets are returned to the locals. The best way to explore is to simply wander along the pristine marble streets, get lost in the alleys and follow your nose. Toast your adventure at Buza, perching on the rocky cliffs, overlooking the sea this shabby hangout is the perfect spot for a sundowner before dinner.

Those wanting to explore more of this beautiful region should hire a car and head out to the Pelješac Peninsula. A scenic 30 minute drive from Sun Gardens brought us to the village of Ston. Surrounded by salt plains and oyster farms it is a popular destination for serious foodies. It is also home to the second largest wall after the Great Wall of China and the steep clamber along it will soon give you an appetite.

Ston is also the gateway to the area's wine growing region. Vines were introduced to the Croatian coast by Greek settlers over 2,000 years ago and today the area produces some delicious Plavac and Chardonnay.

The Worst Thing:

Taxis are surprisingly expensive here and with the hotel so far from Dubrovnik it can feel a little isolated. However, the hotel does offer regular transfers as well as affordable car hire and is the perfect base for escaping the tourists heading off the beaten track.

The Best Thing:

The sheer size of Sun Gardens ensures that you never feel crowded; on our visit we had the entire spa to ourselves, enjoyed cocktails in peace on the hotel's balcony and wandered along the empty shingle beach.

The Details:

A standard room at the five-star Radisson Blu Hotel starts from €110 per night B&B;
www.dubrovniksungardens.com

The new seven-day detox programme starts from €1887.

Sun Garden's one bedroom residences are available to purchase from €184,000, two bedroom residences start at €338,000.