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Sea, Sun and Spa



In a region steeped in centuries-old wellness traditions, The Spa by OCCO stands out with personalized, modern treatments.

Croatia is a stunning land. Whittled islands jut from the translucent blue-green waters of the Adriatic, peeling paint clings to shutters lining narrow ancient alleyways, and the open warmth of natives veers toward astonishing hospitality—the perfect setting for an idyllic summer holiday. On my latest trip to this coastal gem, however, I was eager to explore its long-revered traditions of wellness—and how they’re being reimagined for today’s spa-goer. In the earliest centuries A.D., Romans relaxed and rejuvenated in Croatia’s thermal waters, called *toplice*, which are spread throughout the country. By the mid-1800s, visitors flooded the region for “health and convalescence tourism.” Today, emerging spas are again redefining the nation’s approach to wellness, offering more modern, indulgent options for discerning guests from around the world—and The Spa by OCCO is helping to lead the charge.

The Spa by OCCO

OPENED

2009

THE SPACE

Thermal Area with coal sauna, salt sauna, hammam and aromatherapy steam room; 18-meter lagoon pool; outdoor sun terrace; Tepidarium; fully equipped gym; Spa Vitality Juice Bar

STAFF

13, including 3 therapists, 3 receptionists and 3 spa attendants

MOST POPULAR TREATMENTS

Spa Experience Massage (50 min./\$96); Spa MG Massage (50 min./\$101); Spa Body Detox Ritual (90 min./\$123); Spa Classic Facial Ritual (80 min./\$133); Spa Anti-Age Facial (75 min./\$108)

PRODUCTS USED/RETAILED

Bioeffect, Maria Galland, Natura Bissé Diamond, Occo, Thalion

WEBSITE

[radissonblu.com/en/
resort-dubrovnik/spa](http://radissonblu.com/en/resort-dubrovnik/spa)

A Sense of Place

After several past excursions throughout northern Croatia, I focused on the country's southern region for my latest trip, capped off by two nights in Orašac, 10 miles from Dubrovnik, a bustling tourist city that's a frequent filming site for mega-productions like *Game of Thrones* and *Star Wars*. My home base was the Radisson Blu Resort & Spa, Dubrovnik Sun Gardens, a luxurious resort carved into the Adriatic coast. The sprawling property is practically its own town: 201 luxury rooms, 207 residences, a beach and marina, three pools, two gyms, a fully equipped sports center (with three tennis courts, a squash court and a climbing wall), 16 restaurants and bars, a kids' club, and a shopping promenade with fashion stores, plus a hair salon, pharmacy and grocery store.

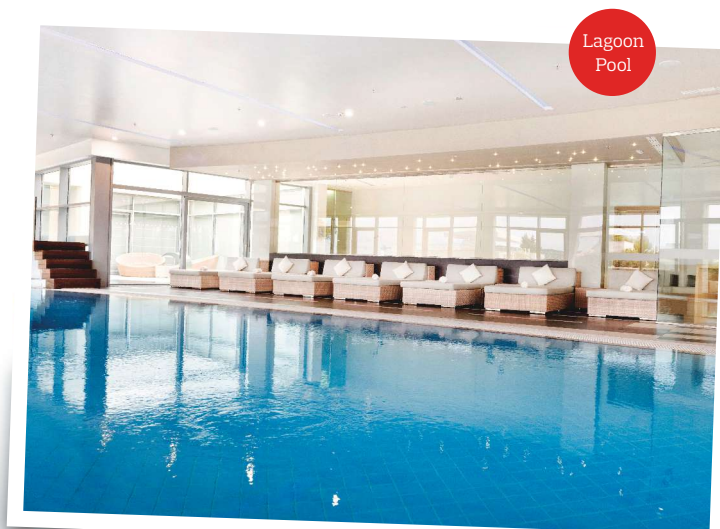
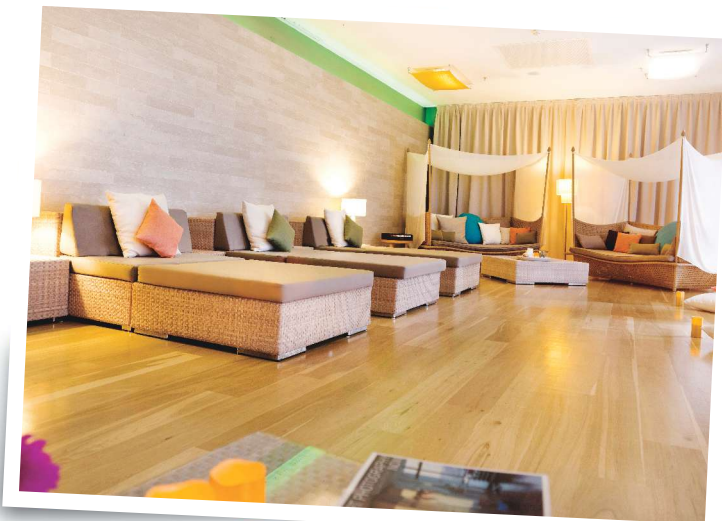
Despite the resort's impressive amenities, The Spa by OCCO is its crown jewel. The spa's staff has made it a mission to provide great service and memorable spa experiences based on three spa concepts: holistic care, aesthetics and beauty, which come together on a spa menu that incorporates total bodycare programs and an expansive retail section. "Our vision is to develop into one of Croatia's leading spa centers, one that sets high industry standards for the European spa market and becomes the first choice for clientele in the region," says head receptionist, Ana Bujak.

This mission appears to be working: The Spa by OCCO has garnered top accolades from TripAdvisor—No. 5 among the Top 25 Hotels for Spa/Relaxation Hotels in the World and No. 12 among the Top 25 Luxury Hotels in Croatia—and was recently chosen as Best Luxury Resort Spa Croatia for 2016 by World Luxury Spa Awards. The property also scored a spot on Gayot's Top 10 Value Spas in the World (the only European spa to do so).

Aside from its many awards, the spa's region-specific focus intrigued me; it's really the first in Croatia—a nation that boasts thousands of miles of coastline—to emphasize "homegrown, natural beauty," explains Bujak. "The OCCO concept was specially designed to offer an authentic and enriching spa experience true to its surroundings, so all products are naturally formulated and inspired by the unspoiled beauty of the Dalmatian Coast and Adriatic sea."

Paradise Found

OCCO takes a holistic approach, from detox programs to treatments customized for guests' individual needs. A wide range of services—facials, manis and pedis, and waxing—entices spa-goers, but body care makes up the bulk of offerings: Spa Thalasso Experiences incorporate peels, hydrotherapy, thermal mud and algae; Spa Body Experiences focus on everything from detoxifying to slimming and shaping; Thalisons Rituals, named after worldwide locales (Orient, Polynesia, Amazon), calm or revitalize; and Luxury Body and Face Treatments target high-end travelers



DID YOU KNOW?

- Sometimes referred to as the Country of A Thousand Islands, Croatia actually consists of nearly 1,250 islands, islets and reefs; today, fewer than 50 are inhabited.
- Croatia is home to eight UNESCO World Heritage sites.
- The city walls of Dubrovnik are among the largest and most complete in Europe.



with purifying, stress-fighting rituals. Couples and teens score their own sections of the menu, and full-day programs package popular treatments at a discount.

After a tour of the 33,000-square-foot space, I first dove into the Thermal Area amenities, interspersing trips to the salt sauna, hammam, coal sauna and aromatherapy steam rooms with cool-water-gushing “lifestyle showers” lined with embedded chromotherapy lights. I felt rejuvenated as I sank into the indoor Jacuzzi tub, approaching that “spa-licious” sense of relaxation.

Despite robust indoor amenities (especially ideal on gloomy days like the one I experienced), the spa’s seaside location remains the definite draw: An outdoor sun terrace provides sweeping Adriatic views and salt-tinged breezes. As George Bernard Shaw once said, those who seek paradise on earth should come to Dubrovnik.

Treatment Time

About 80 percent of the spa’s clients are resort guests, and locals and regional spa fans come year-round, which Bujak attributes to her staff’s commitment



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to offering intuitive, personalized approaches for each guest and providing tailor-made services. "This enables them to have the best possible experience," she adds. "We follow global trends and constantly listen to our clients, keeping in line with their needs and preferences."

I experienced this intuitive approach more than once during my time with therapist Durdica Kolić, who performed an energizing Spa MG Massage. The protocol, which incorporates pure marine magnesium to penetrate deep into the skin and muscles, is "recommended for athletes and those with muscle and bone pain," Bujak says. True, I might not have been particularly athletic on vacation (unless heavy lifting of bread, wine and olive oil counts!), but after climbing countless stone steps to traverse the hilly Croatian terrain, at times lugging overstuffed suitcases, my body yearned for some rejuvenation. The magnesium

created a pleasant tingling effect on my skin, unlike any massage sensation I'd experienced. Just when I was considering requesting firmer pressure (feeling a bit manhandled during massages is my M.O.), Kolić checked in with me, then quickly upped the force—all with delicious results, as my knobby back and neck knots were kneaded smooth.

A Spa Luxury Facial Specific followed, and firmly parked my body in relaxation mode. Kolić used Bioeffect products (an Icelandic skincare brand featuring cellular activators) within the protocol. The service began with a cleansing, toning and gentle exfoliation, followed by Bioeffect EGF Serum, a radiance-boosting face mask and candlelight scalp massage. After



removing the mask with a hot towel and rebalancing my skin with toner, Kolić performed a 20-minute, sleep-inducing interlude that combined classical face massage, acupressure and antiaging massage techniques. I was amazed at the immediate silky smooth effects, and the glow that shone for days afterward. I credit the exquisite, painstakingly performed facial massage—and the inimitable relaxation that beautiful surroundings and welcoming people can provide. 🍷

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