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for little people - the sky's
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holidays in 2017*

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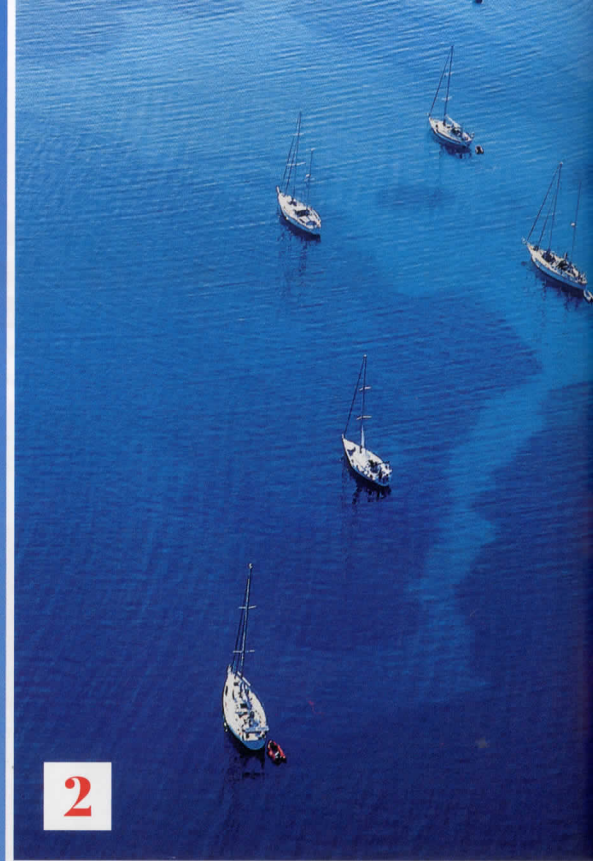
.....
and more...

Croatia

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*Much-visited for its Mediterranean islands and Venetian cities, Croatia has lesser-known treasures inland, too. **Laura Gelder** counts them down*

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1 **Sail away:** No wonder Sunsail has two bases in Croatia. Its 6278 km of coastline, 1,244 islands, islets, rocks and reefs and 60 marinas beg to be explored by boat. Experienced sailors can charter a yacht and go off alone or in a flotilla while those still finding their sea legs can join a skippered vessel – choose a party cruises or a romantic voyage.

2 **Island-hopping heaven:** You don't need access to a yacht to explore Croatia's islands. Both Split and Dubrovnik are ferry ports which connect to popular islands like the glamorous celebrity hot-spot of Hvar. Other top choices include the beach bum's favourite Brač and peaceful Mljet, home to a national park which houses saltwater lakes, pristine forest and a Benedictine monastery.



5



ten of the best 53

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3 Historical treasures: At the heart of Europe and a strategic point in the Mediterranean, Croatia has a rich culture which includes being the origin of the cravat! Split's Roman Walls contain churches from the 12th century, medieval forts and gothic, renaissance and baroque palaces, like the Diocletian's Palace, the world's most complete remains of a Roman palace. Other UNESCO World Heritage Sites include Dubrovnik Old Town and Trogir's maze-like centre. Pula has the best-preserved Roman amphitheatre outside of Italy.

4 The wild factor: Its islands range from the sun-scorched moon-like Pag to the vine- and olive-festooned Korcula. Inland are swamps, mountains and forest. Gorski Kotar is a 2,000-square-metre nature reserve near Rijeka

that's home to wolves, lynx, boars and brown bears. Bird lovers can head to the island of Cres, which has colonies of the Eurasian Griffon vulture.

5 City spoils: Dubrovnik is the most polished of cities, honed for the cruise crowd with high-end shops and trendy bars and restaurants. Split is smaller but its ancient walls contain plenty of buzz. The capital of Zagreb is gaining in popularity and is a year-round city with plenty of arts and culture to entertain. Other popular urban retreats include seaside Zadar, with its quirky art installations, and the photogenic hilltop town of Motovun in rural central Istria.

6 Action-packed: Aside from the usual offering of watersports that include

kayaking, diving and fishing, Croatia offers winter pursuits and adrenaline-pumping options like sky-diving. Skiing can be found just 10 minutes from Zagreb at the country's highest peak, Sljeme. Croatia has an impressive system of caves full of stalactites and stalagmites. The dramatic karst and canyon landscape that hides these underground worlds is also spiced with rivers which are great for white-water rafting and the surrounding countryside can be explored on foot, wheel or horse.

7 Go gastronomy: Each region of Croatia has its own culinary personality. There are Slavic, Hungarian, Viennese and Turkish influences in the hearty meat dishes, desserts and vegetable dishes of the continental regions and Greek, Roman and Illyrian Mediterranean ▶



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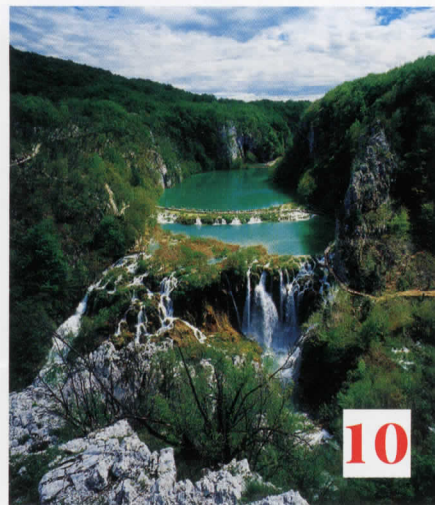
“Croatia’s islands range from the sun-scorched moon-like Pag to the vine and olive-festooned Korcula. Inland are swamps, mountains and forest”

► flavours in the fish delicacies and wines of the coast. In northern Croatia Istria is one of the world’s best truffle hunting grounds while the island of Pag is famous for its eponymous sheep’s cheese.

8 **Wheels away:** Biking is a fast-growing sport in Croatia. The Kvarner region on Croatia’s northern coast offers countless climbs between sea level and 1,400m above on a close-hugging coastal road. Other popular rides include the moon-like island of Pag, which has 14 cycling trails of over 115km and green routes through the National Parks of Krka and Plitvice to see spectacular waterfalls. Intrepid offers a Dubrovnik to Split bike trip.

9 **Total wellness:** There are over 80 wellness resorts throughout Croatia and the Kvarner region and city of Opatija, in particular, is renowned as the country’s wellness centre. Hotels like Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Dubrovnik Sun Gardens offer a number of fitness options like squash and tennis, along with detox treatments and therapies. Northern and eastern Croatia is liberally sprinkled with natural thermal spas.

10 **Road tripping:** Croatia has dramatic roads with hairpin bends on the coast and fairytale villages with bucolic views inland. A drive from Zagreb to Dubrovnik could take in the vineyards of Istria, the waterfalls of Plitvice Lakes and walled cities like Zadar and Trogir. ■



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