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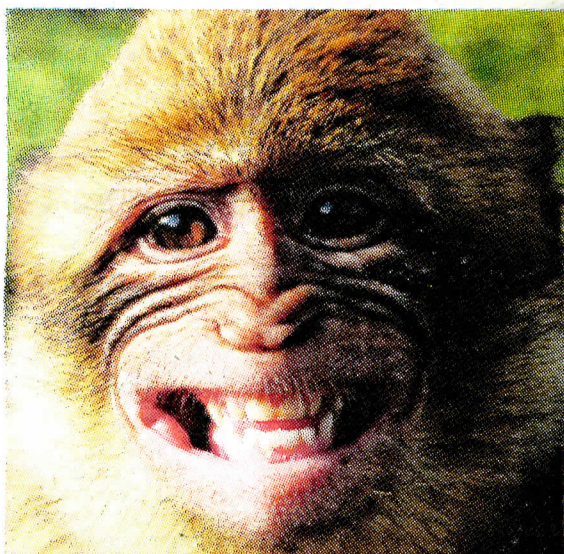
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Dan Hipgrave is smitten by Croatia's fabulous coastline - as he tears past it at 60mph

# Dotty about Dalmatia

ALAMY / ALPHAFRANCE

**B**ANKING right past the easterly tip of Koločep Island, we raced towards the setting sun at speeds of up to 60mph. Our powerful two-seater jet-skis tore through Croatia's glistening Adriatic like a hot knife through butter, and with each unrelenting wave came a rush of exhilaration followed by another drenching of salt water. Through stinging eyes I could just about make out my wife Lynsey and daughter Honey haring off into the distance on their jet-ski.

My nephew Cameron and I had planned on 'hanging back' to keep an eye on the girls but they had other ideas and had well and truly left us in their wake. That'll teach us.

We'd arrived at the Radisson Blu Resort at Dubrovnik Sun Gardens the previous day and were instantly impressed. Situated in a private bay ten miles from Dubrovnik, the hotel occupies an excellent spot, giving guests panoramic views of the Dalmatian coastline.

The resort is vast, with 201 rooms in the main building and 207 private residences. We checked into a two-bedroom apartment, with red terracotta roof tiles and green wooden shutters. It also had a fully equipped kitchenette - useful when travelling as a family.

The walk from the beach to the apartment was long and steep, so while not suitable for families with smaller children it kept us fit, and the sunset views from our balcony proved a suitable pay-off.

**T**HE upside to staying at a large resort is the range of facilities on offer. The Radisson Blu boasts three swimming pools, a spa, an indoor sports centre equipped with climbing wall, squash courts, table tennis, badminton courts, gym, tennis courts, a five-a-side football pitch and also a games room.

There is also a watersports company, H11, located on the beach - we immediately signed up for the incredible Jet-Ski Safari to Koločep and nearby Lopud, led by local

expert Sanjin. They are part of the Elafiti Islands, an archipelago stretching northwest from Dubrovnik. The name comes from the Greek word 'elafos', meaning deer, which used to inhabit the islands in large numbers.

Once the hotel was out of sight, our jet-ski party regrouped in a small bay and switched our engines to neutral as instructed.

'Swim towards that cave over there,' shouted Sanjin, pointing to an area with no visible openings. 'They call this the Blue Cave!'

Honey and Cameron were unconvinced by Sanjin's instruction so they stayed with the jet-skis, but Lynsey and I swam to where he had pointed, took a deep breath and dived beneath the surface. When we came up we were in a small cave filled with the most fabulous blue hues - a real moment to remember.

To appreciate Koločep properly you need to set foot on land. It is a pleasantly green place, with pine and carob woods, olive groves and fragrant gardens.

We stopped for lunch at the revered Villa Ruza in the village of Donje Celo, choosing Dalmatian ham and smoked cheese to start, and grilled sea bass for main course. The restaurant isn't cheap but it's worth the extra money for the staggering location alone.

Afterwards, Sanjin guided us towards Lopud, a lovely island that's home to lush gardens and sandy beaches. According to local historians, Lopud had 30 churches in the 16th Century, as well as several monasteries. The Franciscan monastery, dating from 1483, with its cloister, defensive towers and walls, holds valuable art including the polyptych of Pietro de Giovanni and paintings by the Flemish master Bassan.

Lopud is the more developed of the two islands and is more suitable for half-day or full-day excursions, allowing time to enjoy a leisurely lunch.

Ours was more of a flying visit, after which we tackled yet more

**BIG FAN:** Beyoncé has been spotted on holiday in Dubrovnik



## LATE DEALS OF THE WEEK

### BARGAIN BEST ALL-INCLUSIVE

FLY to Rhodes on June 21 for seven nights at the Golden Odyssey. The family-friendly hotel is close to Tsambika beach and the break costs from £319pp, including flights from Gatwick. Visit [olympicholidays.com](http://olympicholidays.com).

### BARGAIN BEST LUXURY

STAY at the Thai resort of Phulay Bay. Seven nights at the five-star hideaway cost from £1,359pp including flights, transfers and a room upgrade if you book by Tuesday for travel before October. Visit [trailfinders.com](http://trailfinders.com).

### BARGAIN BEST FAMILY

BOOK by June 30 for a week at Forte Village resort in Sardinia from £5,849 for two adults and two children including return flights, half-board and entrance to netball or rugby academies. Visit [superskills.com](http://superskills.com).

### BEST HOTEL

THE Maternwe Lodge in Zanzibar has discounts of about £500 on a seven-night break before July 17. The resort has views of the Indian Ocean and now costs from £800pp on an all-inclusive basis. Flights are extra. Visit [maternwelodge.asiliaafrica.com](http://maternwelodge.asiliaafrica.com).

### BARGAIN BEST BOATING

ENJOY a day cruising along the Thames aboard Edwardian riverboat Genevieve. To celebrate her 100th birthday, private charters have been discounted by £100 in June and July. A fully crewed trip costs from £600 for up to ten people. Visit [vintage-thamescharters.com](http://vintage-thamescharters.com).



CLASSY: The Genevieve riverboat

### BARGAIN BEST CRUISE

SAVE up to £500 on a six-night Burgundy river cruise departing July 19. The Caprice, a luxury hotel-barge, will visit vineyards and historic towns and you can enjoy fine wines and gourmet meals while on board. The trip costs from £1,395pp on an all-inclusive basis with return rail travel and excursions. Visit [planetrail.co.uk](http://planetrail.co.uk).



BOY RACERS: Dan and nephew Cameron aboard their jet-ski. Left: The island of Lupud

### GETTING THERE

Kuoni ([kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk), 01306 747008) offers seven nights B&B at the Radisson Blu Resort & Residences At Dubrovnik Sun Gardens from £678pp. This includes return flights with British Airways from Gatwick and private transfers. To book quote reference KE1070. For further information visit [dubrovniksungardens.com](http://dubrovniksungardens.com). For more details about Dubrovnik, visit [tздubrovnik.hr](http://tздubrovnik.hr).

### STUNNING VISTA:

The view from the family's apartment at the Radisson Blue Resort



waves on the jet-ski journey back to our hotel.

The next day we took another form of transport – one of the hotel's shuttle buses into Dubrovnik, the city dubbed the Pearl Of The Adriatic. The journey takes 20 minutes and tickets cost about £4 for adults and just £2 for children.

We drove across the modern looking Franjo Tudjman Bridge and along the 8 motorway until we reached a turning in the road that offered a prime view of the city. Dubrovnik truly is an architectural masterpiece – even the children let out a small gasp when they first set eyes on it.

The city has been an important port from the 13th Century onwards. It was severely damaged by an earthquake in 1667, and it was shelled repeatedly during the Balkan wars in the 1990s, but is

now the focus of a major restoration programme co-ordinated by Unesco.

After the horrific siege in 1991, the people of Dubrovnik displayed enormous resilience, and in recent years the city has re-established itself as a firm favourite on the tourist map.

A week before we arrived, Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich was spotted relaxing on his yacht in Dubrovnik, singer Beyoncé and rap star husband Jay-Z are fans, and filming of Game Of Thrones took place in the city during our stay.

The bus dropped us off just outside the city walls where we met our guide Mario. He then took us through the Pile Gate and into the old city.

Inside the city walls, Dubrovnik is full of medieval charm. The

glimmering marble street, Stradun, runs the length of the city and is lined with 17th Century baroque buildings.

Either side of Stradun are steep lanes brimming with vibrant cafes, cosy restaurants and smart boutiques. Mario took us to the ornamental sculptures of the Renaissance-Gothic Rector's Palace and to see the spouting stone carved gargoyles at Onofrio's Fountains. As we walked Mario brought the city to life with stories of the hardship and prosperity the city has experienced.

Early evening is a good time to visit the city – it's cooler and cruise ship visitors have returned to their vessels. It is also a great time to appreciate the scale of this jewel, and admire the skill of those who designed and constructed it.

The threat of attacks from the Turks in the 15th Century prompted the city to strengthen the existing forts and add new ones, so that the entire Old Town is now contained within a curtain of stone over a mile long and almost 100ft high.

The views from the wall over the town and sea are great but for the ultimate experience you'll need to take the cable car to the summit of Mount Srđ.

Honey and Cameron were at once excited and petrified about board-

ing the gleaming orange car that heads high over the Old Town.

I must admit I'm not particularly great with heights either, but the trip is worth experiencing clammy hands.

The view is spectacular and there is even a restaurant near the top where you can eat lunch or grab a coffee and enjoy the extraordinary panorama.

**A**FTER a long day we retreated to the serenity of our hotel for a relaxing meal and a nice glass of local wine. With more than eight restaurants to choose from, you will never be bored by what's on offer – the fish and seafood are especially good.

Our favourite restaurant was The Market – from the terrace, you can make out the twinkling of the sea. It is a perfect place for all the family.

Having joined the EU last year and with tourism booming again, Croatia has the feel of a destination on the up – and with such a wealth of natural beauty, rich heritage, undamaged coastlines and warm hospitality, it is no wonder.

I'm sure it won't be long before Croatia is once again known as Europe's hottest destination.

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