

Beyond Dubrovnik

Mary Novakovich discovers other pearls of the Adriatic along the Croatian riviera

Dubrovnik is a thing of beauty. The Old Town enchants effortlessly, its medieval walls attracting holidaymakers like a magnet. But while this Adriatic port gets more than its fair share of visitors – helped by cruise ships and tour groups – the surrounding villages and islands of the Dubrovnik Riviera are often unfairly overlooked. Some are destinations in their own right, and make appealing bases for exploring this dazzling coastline.

► DUBROVNIK

The Old Town has one of the most alluring streets in Europe, Stradun, whose smooth marble surface is flanked by pretty, green-shuttered stone houses.

The Franciscan Monastery is at one end, while the Venetian Gothic Sponza Palace and 16th-century Rector's Palace stand guard at the other. Holidaymakers make a beeline for the medieval walls that wind around the Old Town for more than a mile and offer astounding views of the coast and the town.

Outside the city walls, guests will find most of the resort hotels on the Lapad and Babin Kuk peninsulas. While there are a couple of pebbly beaches just below the Old Town, the most accessible ones include Lapad Bay and Copacabana Beach in Babin Kuk. Regular buses connect the peninsulas with the Old Town, which makes it easy for clients to shuttle between the two areas.

“

Inland are vineyards and orchards, and villages where folklore performances take place regularly

Travel 2 offers a week's B&B in a sea-view room at the four-star Valamar Dubrovnik President in Babin Kuk from £579, including flights and transfers.

► CAVTAT & KONAVLE

Many holidaymakers discover Cavtat while taking the 45-minute boat trip south from

Dubrovnik, or the cheaper way by bus around the bay. The village is full of charm, with cafes and restaurants lining the quayside and attractive pebbly beaches tucked into the peninsula. Monarch offers seven nights at the Cavtat Hotel, which overlooks the Bay of Tiha and features a rooftop pool, from £274, including flights and transfers.

Cavtat is part of the Konavle region, which ends at the Montenegrin border. Inland are lush vineyards and orchards, along with villages where folklore performances take place, notably every Sunday from Easter till October in Cilipi. Villa Ivana in the hamlet of Mihanici sits on a hill, with wonderful views of the fertile Konavle Valley from the [→](#)



Korcula Town

→ garden pool. A week in the stone house, which sleeps four, with Vintage Travel costs from £475.

▶ ELAPHITE ISLANDS

This sleepy archipelago, of which only three islands are inhabited, has been a bolthole since 15th-century Dubrovnik aristocrats discovered it made an agreeable place for summer residences. There are ferries from Dubrovnik that combine all three islands in one day, and visits here usually have the effect of making clients want to spend more time in this blissful spot.

The smallest of the three, Kolocep, has a delightful little harbour and one of the few sandy beaches in the region. The ferries then move on to Sipan, the largest island but the least developed for tourism other than for day-trippers. A stroll between the two toy-town harbours reveals ruins of a Roman villa and an old ducal palace among the olive groves and pine woods.

No cars are allowed on Lopud, which makes it an especially tranquil place. There's also a rare sighting of a sandy beach, Sunj Bay, which is reached via a walk through pine-scented woods.

Prestige Holidays offers breaks in both Lopud and Sipan. A week's B&B at the four-star Hotel Bozica in Sipan, which lies across the tiny bay from Sudurad harbour and has only 27 rooms, costs from £379, including flights and transfers. In Lopud, a week at the Lafodia Sea Resort, which has wonderful sea views and its own beach, costs from £519, including breakfast, flights and transfers. Thomson offers an all-inclusive week at the adult-only Sensimar Kalamota Island Resort in Kolocep from £600, including flights and transfers.

▶ MLJET

Mljet is another of those islands where Odysseus is said to have stopped on his travels – well, he did get around a bit. But it



ABOVE: Old Town, Dubrovnik

doesn't need a mythical Greek hero to attract clients who want a seriously relaxing holiday. In contrast to the scrubby mountains that loom over the Adriatic coast, the island of Mljet is one of the greenest in Croatia. Covered in forests and walking

trails, Mljet is an unspoilt national park where the best way to get around is on foot or by bicycle – although beach buggies are a fun way to pootle around the island. In this quiet place lie the ruins of what had been Croatia's second-largest Roman castle →



LEFT: The Konavle region

BELOW: Lafodia Sea Resort, Lopud



→ after Diocletian's in Split, in the village of Polace on the western end of the island.

There are several sandy beaches around the island, as well as two saltwater lakes, one of which is home to a Benedictine monastery and a restaurant. It's a place for gentle strolls, boat rides and lazy lobster lunches by the waterfront.

Balkan Holidays offers a week's half-board at the Hotel Odisej, which overlooks Pomena's harbour, from £366, including flights and transfers.

► KORCULA

This fertile island can be a day trip from Dubrovnik, but Korcula has so much for clients to explore that it's tempting to spend more time there. It's separated by a narrow channel from the Peljesac peninsula and, like its peninsular neighbour, is a major producer of wine. The walled Venetian-style Korcula Town is a delight to explore, especially as its honey-coloured limestone buildings, museums and restaurants are all in a car-free zone.

Korcula insists that Marco Polo



Korcula insists that Marco Polo was born there before his parents moved to Venice

was born there before his parents moved to Venice – so much so that it's built up a small industry around it. There's a Marco Polo Museum, a Marco Polo Tower, Marco Polo tours, even a Hotel Marco Polo. More pertinently, there are numerous beaches around the island, and its many regattas make it popular with sailors. Between Korcula and the Peljesac peninsula is the Skozi archipelago, whose 19 islands attract holidaymakers keen on kayaking, canoeing, diving, snorkelling and boating.

Jet2holidays has a week's B&B at the Hotel Korcula from £690, including flights from Manchester and transfers.



Montenegro

Croatia's mountainous neighbour is just 20 miles from Dubrovnik, so it's not surprising that Montenegro is an inviting option for a side trip. For such a small country, it packs a lot in, with breathtaking natural scenery, exquisite towns and endless beaches that stretch towards the Albanian border.

Cruise clients are already familiar with Kotor (*pictured*), the Unesco World Heritage Site in a spectacular limestone fjord-like bay. Its medieval walled old town is like a mini Dubrovnik, with handsome churches, squares and lively cafes. One of the most rewarding things to do is the three-mile uphill hike to the forbidding St John's fortress that watches over the town. The views along the way are magnificent and worth the climb.

Beach lovers on a day trip from Dubrovnik often head for

the Budva Riviera – along with much of the local population. While its seven miles of sandy beaches are a major draw, clients will also enjoy exploring Budva's Venetian Old Town, which was substantially rebuilt after a devastating earthquake in 1978. Classic Collection Holidays has a week's B&B at the five-star Hotel Splendid Spa Resort overlooking Becici beach from £933, including flights and transfers.

While luxury resorts have been creeping into the country – including the Aman Resort at Sveti Stefan, the superyacht-filled Porto Montenegro and the new upmarket developments at Lustica Bay – many parts of Montenegro are still wonderfully untouched. Lake Skadar, the largest lake in the Balkans, is a wildlife paradise and a captivating place for activity holidays including kayaking and hiking.



TOP: Hotel Odisej, Mljet

LEFT: Marco Polo House, Korcula

