

## DESTINATIONS

### CROATIA & THE BALKANS | CRUISE

# Q&A

## MARINA ROGOZNICA

### CRUISE DIRECTOR, CRUISE CROATIA

INTERVIEW BY Clare Vooght

#### Q. How did you get into the role of cruise director?

A. After working as a tour guide across the world for 13 years, my friend (who had been working as a cruise director) persuaded me to try it. I wasn't a big fan of boats – but to my surprise, I found myself hooked, and this summer is my third season with Cruise Croatia.

#### Q. What does the job involve?

A. A travel journalist spent a week on one of our signature cruises and gave a fantastic description of my role: 'a fixer of all things'. We introduce guests to all that makes our country unique; teach them about local customs, food and wine; help them with restaurant bookings or extra excursions; and make sure they enjoy their time in Croatia.

#### Q. What does a typical day on board look like for you?

A. On a small cruise ship, it's a pleasure to get up early to see the sunrise with a cup of coffee while everyone is still sleeping. I go over the itinerary with the captain the day before, so in the morning I check everything is still planned depending on weather and wind. After breakfast we'll do a swim stop, then after lunch it's time for an activity on the ship or a guided tour of a port. The most important thing is to keep guests familiar with the schedule and make sure everything runs smoothly.

#### Q. What do you enjoy most?

A. My favourite part of the job is meeting new people. Each cruise is different because the guests are



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different and they all bring their own energy. I enjoy listening to their life stories, sharing my love for and knowledge of my own country, as well as comparing lifestyles in different cultures.

#### Q. Which are your top ports?

A. My favourite stops are the islands of Mljet and Vis. When we dock at Mljet, we visit the national park which covers almost a third of the whole island. You get a Zen-like feeling upon entering the park, with the smell of the pine forest and secluded areas where you can enjoy swimming in the salt lake. The island of Vis is something else entirely. It was an army base during the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, meaning it was a secluded island where only military personnel lived. Today it is a place where time has stopped, without overcrowded streets of tourists – it's

a glimpse of the Mediterranean as it once was. I enjoy every port we dock at – whether it's the atmosphere,

great restaurants or interesting history. But I also love when the captain knows all the best swim spots along the route and we stop in the middle of the sea to dive in.

#### Q. Why do you think small-ship sailing in Croatia is so popular?

A. It's the easiest and most beautiful way to visit the best-known Croatian islands. This is a paradise for sailing, with more than a thousand (mostly uninhabited) islands. You hop on a beautiful small ship with comfortable cabins, visit a new place each day, meet new friends and enjoy delicious cuisine. The most popular route is Split-Dubrovnik and vice

#### MARINA'S TOP TIP

Croatia has so much diversity in such a small area – from fields of sunflowers in the continental part to the capital city of Zagreb, where I live, to mountains, vineyards and crystal-blue sea – so take the time to explore what makes this country special.



PICTURE: Edin Tuzlak

versa, visiting gorgeous islands such as Hvar and Korčula and popular cities including Split and Dubrovnik.

#### Q. What advice would you give agents selling a Croatia cruise?

A. Clients who have travelled on big cruise ships say this is an entirely different experience. It's much more personal and friendly with a maximum of 19 cabins per sailing, so even if they don't like more traditional ships, recommend trying this. All the ships are modern and very comfortable so everybody can find a space for themselves, whether they want to socialise with other guests or just read in peace. Croatia still has hidden gems worth exploring, from the beauty and history to the gastronomy and wine – and, since we don't export that many products, the only option is to come to this wonderful country and explore. **TW**