

# True blue

Seen Split? Done Dubrovnik? Adriatic island Korcula is a good short-break alternative, finds Mary Novakovich



**I**t's one of Croatia's largest islands and a favourite with holidaymakers cruising through the Adriatic, but Korcula is much more than a stop on a busy itinerary.

Ringed by medieval walls, Korcula Town, the island's capital, is the big draw. But even on a short break, clients can discover some of the island's peaceful villages, enchanting beaches and – unexpectedly – some of the best wine in Croatia.

**▶ SELL: CAPITAL CHARMS**  
A narrow channel separates

Korcula from the Peljesac peninsula that snakes its way northwest of Dubrovnik. Unlike many of the islands in the Adriatic, Korcula has a lush, green and quite hilly interior, with a heavily indented coastline harbouring pebbly beaches.

For holidaymakers taking the catamaran from Dubrovnik or the ferry from Orebic on the Peljesac peninsula, their first sight of the island is the creamy limestone of Korcula Town's fortifications ringing a small peninsula, with terracotta rooftops rising above.

A stroll within Korcula Town's

walls is a delight, with narrow alleyways of stone houses fanning out from the centre in the shape of a fishbone. In the centre is tiny St Mark's Square, which is dominated by the 15th-century St Mark's Cathedral, the Treasury Museum and the Town Museum.

Around the corner is the house that the islanders insist was the birthplace of Marco Polo, and a whole industry has sprung up around this belief. Whether or not you accept the story, there is plenty for clients looking for culture and Croatian folklore. The most popular is the

Moreska sword dance, a dazzling spectacle that is held in an open-air theatre every Monday and Thursday during the summer.

Much of Korcula's charm lies in its lively atmosphere – especially in the cafes and restaurants that make the most of the sea views as they curve around the peninsula. Just before sunset, visitors make a beeline for Massimo's, a cocktail bar on top of the 15th-century Zakerjan Tower at the northern tip of the peninsula. Once you climb the ladder at the top, you've earned the fabulous views of the

coastline as the sun goes down. The beaches around Korcula Town are mainly rocky or pebbly, so advise clients to bring swimming shoes. There is a sandy beach about a 20-minute walk from the old town at Luka Korculanska. Clients can also take a water taxi to Badija, one of the islands in the Skoji archipelago, which has a Franciscan monastery as well as quiet beaches.

**“Lumbarda has a wonderfully laid-back atmosphere and – a rarity in Croatia – sandy beaches**

**SEE: BEACHES AND VINES**

Fewer than four miles from Korcula Town – and connected by bus and water taxi – is the fishing village of Lumbarda. It doesn't have the buzzing air of the capital, nor its day-trippers and cruise visitors. But what it does have is a wonderfully laid-back atmosphere and – a rarity in Croatia – sandy beaches. The two main ones are on the eastern side of the village, Bilin Zal and Vela Przina, and

the long stretches of sand make them popular with families. During the summer season, which begins in June, Lumbarda's mellow mood steps up a gear – mainly in the form of its Friday



**RIGHT:** St Mark's Cathedral

**FAR RIGHT:** Moreska sword dance



PICTURES: CNTB/DAVOR ROSTUHAR; STUDIO GOBBO; ADAM BATTERBEE

night fish barbecues in front of the little village beach. It's the chance to try freshly caught sardines, snapper and squid in a festive atmosphere. The sandy soil produces one

of Croatia's finest white wines, grk, but it's unlikely most visitors will have heard of it, as it's made only in Lumbarda. Wine lovers can taste the delicious dry white for themselves by visiting any

of the seven wineries in the village. The three largest, Bire, Zure and Popic, don't require appointments – just turn up for tastings of grk and the robust red, plavac mali, also made there.

To explore the rest of the island, holidaymakers will need to hire a car or a scooter, especially if they want to visit the beautiful beaches that are tucked into the deep coves of the southern

coast. The island's main artery, the D118, leads to the village of Pupnat, the oldest in Korcula. Lunch at the rustic little Konoba Mate restaurant is worth booking, especially after a morning spent at the gorgeous pebbly beach at Pupnatska Luka. Carry on further west to the village of Smokvica, which, along with Cara, is the centre of the production of posip, a floral white wine whose vineyards dominate the centre of the island. Snorkellers will want to check out the small, secluded pebbly beach at Zitna, near the village of Zavalatica. Holidaymakers arriving from Split will dock in the port of Vela Luka, at the westernmost end of the island. Although it's Korcula's largest town, it doesn't have the same flow of tourists – but its western location gives it some stupendous sunsets. Fishing and olive oil production keep it busy,

as does the Vela Spila cave in the olive groves above the town. This eerie limestone cavity looks like something out of Indiana Jones, and archaeological digs continually reveal more treasures. **STAY: SEASIDE CHIC** The luxury boom that has been spreading along Croatia's coast and some of the islands has been slow in reaching Korcula. While there is a smattering of high-end hotels, most are comfortably mid-range. The most luxurious option in Korcula Town is the Lesic Dimitri Palace, a sumptuous, exquisitely designed residence of five suites in an 18th-century bishop's palace. Each suite has an exotic theme – Arabian, Indian, Venetian among them – as well as fitted kitchens. Less than a 10-minute walk from Korcula Town's historic centre is the boutique Hotel Korsal, an elegant four-star with only 18 rooms. Set within

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**RIGHT:**  
Popic winery

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Zitna beach

**BELOW:**  
Hotel Borik



## ASK THE EXPERT



**David Skillicorn,**  
general manager,  
Prestige Holidays

Korcula is a fabulous island and we're delighted about the improved catamaran services, meaning faster access from neighbouring islands, and from Dubrovnik and Split. Roads on the island have been improved, and we are featuring an absolute gem of a new hotel there. Tara's Lodge is elegant, boutique and funky, even offering boat trips out with the owner to go octopus watching – and handling. We expect Korcula to sell very well, as it always does."

→ gardens on the seafront, it's just a few steps from a little pebble beach.

While the Korsal is suitable for couples, families might prefer the much larger Hotel Liburna slightly further along the bay. All 112 rooms have sea views, and there's an outdoor pool, tennis courts and a kids' club, as well as a pebble beach.

For contemporary chic, Tara's Lodge offers a classy escape in a modern hotel overlooking the bay at Zrnovska Banja. It's about two and a half miles west of Korcula Town, which is accessible by water taxi. The hotel



## The eerie limestone cavity looks like something out of Indiana Jones, and digs continually reveal more treasures

offers plenty of activities for clients who don't wish to stray far including yoga, bike tours, kayaking, snorkelling, paddleboarding and boat tours.

Prestige Holidays has a five-night bed-and-breakfast break at Tara's Lodge, departing April 14, from £747 per person, including flights and transfers.

In Lumbarda, the Hotel Borik is a friendly three-star facing the small village beach. There's an outdoor pool as well as bike and kayak hire. The rooms are simple – the ones in the rear annexe have balconies with sea views – but the welcome is exceptionally warm. Four nights' bed and breakfast starts at £325 per person, also with Prestige Holidays, for a May 19 departure, including flights and transfers. **TW**

