

# It's oh so quiet

**Seek out Dubrovnik's sleepier spots with Mary Novakovich's guide to escaping the crowds**

**T**ake one glimpse of Dubrovnik's exquisite Old Town, ringed by medieval and Renaissance walls, and it's obvious why Croatia's most-visited destination is still high on the list for cruise passengers and day-trippers.

Visitor numbers show no sign of slowing down, but there are ways to escape the crowds and get more from this Adriatic beauty.

Up to 10,000 cruise passengers

descend on Dubrovnik every day during the summer months, and most don't venture beyond the Old Town. Many visitors don't realise that the Old Town is just a fraction of the city, and that other districts can make a much more practical base for holidaymakers.

There's an efficient network of buses that connects all districts to the Old Town, making it very straightforward for clients to get around.

## ▶ BEYOND THE CITY WALLS

On the western side of the Old Town is the Pile Gate, which leads to the university quarter as well as several little pebbly coves and the cooling green expanse of Gradac Park.

While there are good accommodation options here for clients, there's even greater choice just next door in the Lapad neighbourhood, farther along the peninsula. The



→ atmosphere here is much more relaxed and lacks the frenetic pace often found in the Old Town.

Hotels cling to the wooded hillsides overlooking limpid Lapad Bay and its pebbly beaches. Just off the bay is Setaliste Kralja Zvonimira, a pedestrianised, tree-shaded thoroughfare lined with cafes and low-rise hotels. Locals who want a break from the crowds in the Old Town come to Lapad to eat, especially in the restaurants along Ulica Kralja Tomislava.

The family-friendly ambience of Lapad carries on to its neighbour, Babin Kuk, which sprawls all over the northernmost peninsula in the city. As with Lapad, the interior of Babin Kuk is wonderfully green, with large swathes of woods covering the hillsides. Clients who want a chilled-out beach holiday have plenty of choice among the resort hotels here, some of which have direct beach access. The footpath that covers the northern coast goes past some of Dubrovnik's loveliest beaches, including Copacabana.

The path eventually leads to the deep harbour at Gruz, which cruise aficionados will recognise as the city's cruise terminal. While Gruz doesn't offer as much as Babin Kuk or Lapad, and is distinctly lacking in beaches, there are several good draws for clients who wish to use it as a base.

One attraction is the food market each morning, where tantalising stalls of fruit, vegetables, meats, cheeses



**Locals who want a break from the crowds come to Lapad to eat, especially the restaurants along Ulica Kralja Tomislava**

and fish are set up near the harbour. It's a more authentic experience than the market in Gunduliceva Square in the Old Town, which is geared more towards tourists. And as with Lapad, the cafes and restaurants in Gruz have much more of a local flavour.

#### ISLAND ODYSSEY

Gruz is also the departure point for boat trips to some of the islands strung out along this part of southern Dalmatia. The Elaphite Islands are especially appealing, and can be visited in a number of ways. Ferries leave from Gruz's terminal several times a day and stop at Kolocep, Lopud and Sipan.

Kolocep, the first stop on the timetable, is the smallest of the inhabited islands and is a pleasant place for a short stroll around the harbour of the tiny village of Donje Celo.

The ferry usually carries on to Sipan, the farthest of the islands, so that holidaymakers can spend the most

time on Lopud – mainly because it has one of the most beautiful beaches in the region. Sandy Sunj beach is about a 30-minute walk from the port, but there's a little taxi service that offers lifts to the beach in a golf buggy.

Sipan, the largest of the Elaphite Islands, deserves a bit more time than is usually allowed on ferry schedules.



BELOW:  
Pile Gate,  
Old Town



LEFT:  
Lapad,  
Dubrovnik

RIGHT:  
Bowa  
restaurant,  
Sipan



Its two ports, Sudurad and Sipanska Luka, are both inviting little places separated by peaceful olive groves and family-run vineyards.

Clients may find it more convenient – and not particularly expensive – to go on a private boat excursion with agencies such as Adriatic Explore. They can set their own timetable for the islands, and also take special trips

to some of the islands' restaurants that are best reached by boat.

Bowa on Sipan is an exceptional place for a lunch of freshly grilled fish, followed by a swim in the restaurant's own patch of pebbly beach.

Boats from Gruz also go to the alluring island of Mljet, one of the greenest in the Adriatic. Nearly half of the island is a national park, which →



**Prestige Holidays** has a week's stay at the Valamar Collection Dubrovnik President Hotel from £799 per person, departing May 9, 2019. The price includes return flights from Gatwick with British Airways, private transfers and B&B accommodation. [prestige-holidays.co.uk](http://prestige-holidays.co.uk)

## Tried & Tested

Hovering over the western edge of Babin Kuk like a stately ocean liner is five-star grande dame Valamar Collection Dubrovnik President Hotel.

Breezy, contemporary and unstuffy is the style – all very modern decor, with sea views and terraces in its 292 spacious rooms and suites. It has its own expanse of pebbly beach, as well as a huge outdoor pool and well-equipped spa.

Seafood is the star of its main restaurant, and there's also a piano bar and beach bar. A bus trip from right outside to the Old Town takes 15 minutes.

It's one of a cluster of Valamar hotels in Babin Kuk, which include the four-star Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel and Valamar Argosy Hotel. **Book it:** Doubles from €254. [valamar.com](http://valamar.com)



## The True Specialists to Croatia

150 flights per week from all over the UK

- The widest choice of holidays to Croatia since 1966
- Choose from over 120 hotels in 26 resorts & islands
- Loyalty bonus for repeat clients
- Baggage & transfers included
- Early booking discounts
- Prices from £344pp

Golden Horn, BRAC ISLAND

 **Balkan Holidays**  
The Trusted Travel Company Since 1966

Brochures via BP Trade-Gate » Viewdata Istel: BAL / Fastrak: BAL » [www.facebook.com/groups/BalkanAgents](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BalkanAgents) » [www.twitter.com/BalkanAgents](http://www.twitter.com/BalkanAgents)

020 7543 5555  
[balkanholidays.co.uk/agents](http://balkanholidays.co.uk/agents)





**LEFT:**  
Sudurad,  
Sipan

**RIGHT:**  
Banje beach  
and Old Town

**BELOW:**  
Park Orsula



➔ is where the ferry docks. From here, holidaymakers can rent bikes to explore the park, which includes astonishingly pretty lakes and a monastery.

## COASTAL DELIGHTS

Head just south of the Old Town, and other options open up. Overlooking the rocky coastline



**Despite its popularity as an island escape, Lokrum is a blissful spot for an afternoon of chilling out**

that runs from Dubrovnik's city beach, Banje, is a string of high-end hotels, many of which have fashioned their own swimming platforms from the rocks. There's more of a rarefied air among these five-star hotels, which bask in views of the Old Town but are away from the hubbub – and many offer free boat shuttles to the Old Port.

This southern side of Dubrovnik outside the Ploce Gate is closer to one of the city's most delightful beaches, Sveti Jakov, which is more peaceful than the busy Banje Beach just outside the gate. The fact that it requires negotiating a steep rocky path to reach it might help explain its more tranquil nature, but it's worth the effort – especially for superb views of the Old Town.

Clients who enjoy hiking can take the rocky path along the

hillside south of Sveti Jakov to another of Dubrovnik's most sublime viewpoints, Park Orsula. This amphitheatre embedded in the scrubby hillside is the scene of summertime concerts, and when events aren't being staged, it's a wonderfully relaxing place to watch the sun go down and take in those marvellous views.

One sight that looms in the Adriatic is the island of Lokrum. Despite its popularity as an island escape – and one of the locations of *Game of Thrones* – Lokrum remains a blissful spot for an afternoon of chilling out. Smothered in forested footpaths and surrounded by rocky beaches, the island also features the ruins of a monastery and a saltwater lagoon. Even in the height of summer, holidaymakers can still find a quiet corner for a picnic away from the crowds. **TW**



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; ANTONIO BOKSIC