

BONK'S ALMANAC OF DALMATIAN ANECDOTES AND MEMORIES

I was doing alright in this race until I tried to round Drvenik Veli unnecessarily close and went ashore for a BBQ, after which I threw my hat at it a bit and wandered off-router closer under Korcula and Mljet (you pronounce 'm the way you spell 'm) thinking that maybe a kindly future WX would reward the extra height I was taking, but that, of course, was foolish. So enough about that, and instead here's a compilation of some of my memories of sailing in these waters IRL I shared in chat

Hi Zorba. Thanks for this. Will bring back lots of memories of cruising these waters.

Venice

Might as well start the recollections in Venice and the time Mrs bonk and I flew to Venice's Marco Polo airport and caught a water taxi to join our friends' HR48 lying on the Isola Certosa marina. That night we all went 'ashore' for drinks on St Mark's Square. The whiskey was eye-wateringly expensive and then on the way home the water taxi driver tried to gazump the price - bonk got cross!! The next day we motored around the lagoon, but unlike James Bond we couldn't go up the Grand Canal.



Aye, aye, our skipper had a penchant for night sailing so we left at 2300 destination Rovinj, which I think I remember was the pre-WWI Austrian belle monde's summer resort. The exit from the marina was hairy as we took a narrow back channel that was marked only by a few black unlit stakes. We motored all the way of course – the Hallberg Rassy weighs 23 tonne including 800 litres of diesel and literally a tonne of books, so it's nice to be sailing, even if only virtually.

Pula

So, FYI, on the horizon on our right lies Pula, the capital of the once Roman province of Istria. There is an ancient amphitheatre here; bonk slept once in its shadows the night before setting off in a Lagoon 54 for Antigua with stops for major repairs in Palma and minor ones in Las Palmas. James

Joyce also slept here but for much longer than one night. There is a statue of him in honour of his sojourn. I have a photo somewhere of me with my arm around him, but here is the great man alone, seated in a very plastic modern setting, which he can hardly be entirely happy about.



Of course, Joyce only ever wrote about Dublin, and a lot of that only about one day. Give me Hemingway any other day, who writes about places all over the world, and in more comprehensible prose, including a minor oeuvre he called 'Across the River and into the Trees' Venice of course, about a love affair between a WWII US-Army colonel with his days numbered and a young, beautiful local contessa. Good read!

Apart from having been a Roman possession, Istria and much of Croatia's coast was of course Venetian during the late Middle Ages, then Austrian, then part of Napoleonic France, then of the Austro-Hungarian Empire again, and then the Istrian bit briefly part of the then recent start-up Italy in between the World Wars, part of Tito's Yugoslavia, to finally become part of a wholly independent nation post the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, before conceding some of its sovereignty again to membership of the European Union.

Rovinj

Sorry, I got mixed up there, Rovinj is not the mondain place I remembered, but a simpler smaller port town with a mediaeval heritage. It's a bit like a mini-Dubrovnik, but rustic rather than touristic. There's a lovely open market on the town square in front of the quay walls every Friday. Naturally, the girls were off to the market as soon as we had moored up alongside the western pier. Later, some of us did the climb to the church at the top of the hill, up narrow stairs past quaint ancient terraced houses.



Opatija

So top left ahead of us is Opatija and top right Rijeka, Croatia's main commercial port and (I think, please correct me) Croatia's second city. We went into Opatija with the HR48 as well. It's a bit of a hike from the marina to the heart of the town where all its fancy old world hotels are, but well worth it, and we enjoyed the high tea at Hotel Kvarner.



Rijeka

My friends kept that HR48 in Biograd for two winters, and some of us used to fly out to Zadar in the spring to get her ready for the season. More about those places later.

One year, the anti-fouling hadn't arrived and in a last minute attempt to get it, I drove from Biograd to Rijeka, where the importer actually had our product. An amazing motorway through tunnels and over viaducts, financed in part by the EU, I believe, pre-membership. Naturally we missed the turn for Rijeka and ended up driving to Zagreb for a while, which was not good as the importers' warehouse was closing at 1600 for a long holy weekend.



My 'navigator' had a new-fangled i-phone (a router for the road) so we remained confident we'd be alright, but it turned out he couldn't type so we ended up in a hilly suburb first and finally only just made it to the warehouse. We took the coast road back to Biograd. Beautiful, until it got dark, as it took twice as long – 4 hours.

Biograd and Zadar

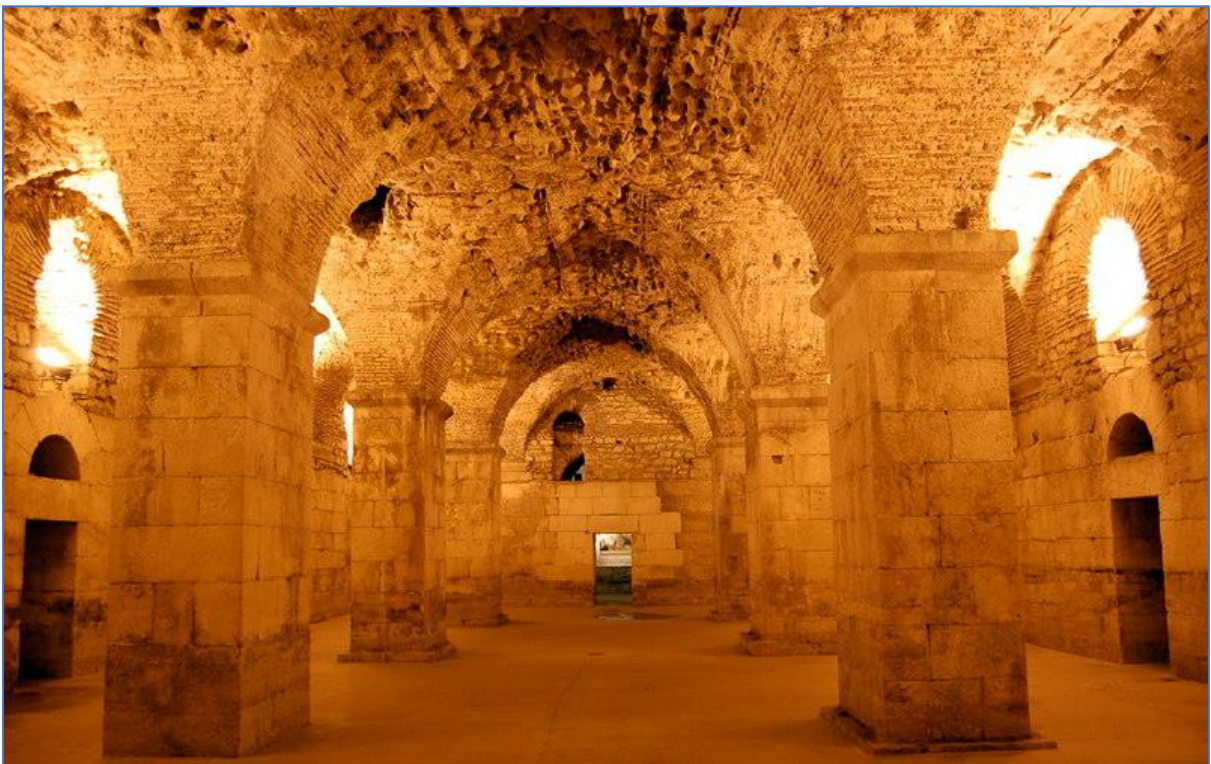
Apologies, the racing has been time consuming, so there has been little opportunity for further tourist notes by self or my Croatian friends, but right now, on paths less travelled, Aroa is passing by Biograd, a lovely town with a magnificent yachting marina, and Echium is passing Zadar, the capital city of Zadar province. There is a wonderful new quayside boulevard in Zadar, where the waves drive in under the piles and cause a sound like a deep bass trombone to emanate through apertures in the pavement deck. Ryanair flies/used to fly to Zadar. The airport is a converted military base. Biograd and Zadar back in the early Middle Ages interchanged the role of capital city of the Croatian kingdom. But then the Venetians took over.



Split

Due east of our leaders, on the mainland, we find Split. This (I think) is pretty much the heart of the competitive yachting scene in Croatia, the bay in front of it providing a splendid racing arena. I remember lying in Split en-route bringing the HR48 (with hoot) for the winter to Malta. Seven years ago, maybe? There was an impressive racing yacht alongside with a fried Carbon mast. There's an awful lot of lightning along this coast all Summer long. No lightning at the moment though...

<https://en.allmetsat.com/images/lightning-europe-anim.php>.



Split was also the seat of Diocletian, the Emperor who first divided the Roman Empire in two, and who hailed from these parts. The ruins of his palace are right in the city centre. Zorba777 asks @Bonk Is that the origin of the word "split"? Probably just a coincidence. Indeed, perhaps maybe Rutherford was born there.

Korcula

The island we are now mostly sailing toward is Korcula, phonetically Korchula (Croatians place a curly wave atop the 'c' to denote it's soft). The island's capital is across on the other side on the north east corner. Very pretty and a must visit as one M Polo was born here. Expensive and exposed marina though.



Last time I was there (with hoot) we anchored off in a quite bay round the corner. Little man came out in a dinghy and charged us 20 Euro. Only other time that happened to me was two years ago off Formentera (with hoot's sister). Same price.

Cavtat

So, good mornin' all, and as we head for King's Landing, here's a tale of a true experience. Back before Croatia joined the EU, you had to clear customs in Cavtat, 5nm south east of King's Landing aka Dubrovnik. It's quite a nice place to moor up for the start of a cruise in Croatia. You can simply tie up along the town's main wall, and there are pleasant restaurants ashore, and it is quiet and peaceful, unlike Dubrovnik.

Of course, as remarked, Croatia is nowadays part of the EU, so no need for stopping in Cavtat anymore, unless of course you are flying the Red Ensign (or the Stars & Stripes, etc.).

Dubrovnik

A frequent ferry takes you from Cavtat to Dubrovnik with its polished (from centuries of walkers) marble paved streets, Prada, Maximara and Benetton boutiques, jewellery shops and restaurants.



One early May we were ashore there by lunchtime, sauntering through the pre-season relatively quiet centre, being accosted by restaurateurs and waiters offering 10% and even 20% discount. Early in the season, and then a strong Irish accent called out 'Are ya from Ireland?' Well we were, but the caller clearly wasn't, even though 'ya' is Ulster English for 'you' . 6ft 2 (1.85m) tall and swarthy, he was dribbling/bouncing a basketball and said 'Ya must come an' eat in my place' and 'Does any of ya play Gaelic?' Gaelic is the Irish language but is better known and practiced as Irish football, which is handball, basketball, rugby and football combined.

So Cormac (hoot's eldest) said he did, and basketball as well. 'Try take the ball of me'. Young Cormac accepted the challenge. And as Cormac went for the ball, Ivan (that was his name) turned and raised his shoulder, knocking Cormac over. Cormac was also 6ft 2 and in his thirties.

So we had to dine at his place despite there were better discounts being offered and he fed us with potatoes and chard and sausage, and hoot asked him 'Where did ye pick up the accent?' 'Ye' is Cork English for 'you'. And he told us he was an ex-basketball international but had played Gaelic for Co Tyrone (that's in Ulster, the north of Ireland).

He was ex-military (now) but said he'd been in the North for a holiday and won 30K in the lottery and liked it so much he decided to stay! To keep fit he joined the local GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) club, which sport of course is also the home of much nationalist and rebellious sentiment - go figure. From club to county representation, and his excellent Irish accent with indeed

a northern twang. Ya'all be familiar with it - think Gerry Adams, Eileen Foster, Iain Paisley. In Dubrovnik in May.

Vis

And if you are wondering why this wonderful coast is named after a breed of dog, surely the answer is obvious. The spots on its back are no more than a poor bit of chartwork by Slartibartfast (see: <https://hitchhikers.fandom.com/wiki/Slartibartfast>) of the coast of Croatia, highlighting all the sports a SOLer can stop for a BBQ and IRL sailors to anchor off and go for a swim or indeed for a BBQ, like the future Mrs. bonk and I did on our second day sailing together ever in 2001 in a chartered Feeling 30 (with in-mast reefing quite a bit slower than a 2021 Seascope 18!) and anchored of Vis and swam ashore and met some other sailors who were bbq'ng calamari and vis (of course, of some sort or other).

Wonderful coast and a wonderful race, Zorba!

bonknhoot / March 2021