U.S. Secretary of State Clinton visits Croatia

Croatia has huge potential and the United States is optimistic about its future, U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton said during her first official visit to Zagreb.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid her first official visit to Croatia on October 31, 2012 and in talks with Croatia’s top officials gave strong support to Croatia’s EU accession on 1 July 2013. Clinton arrived in Croatia after a tour of Croatia’s neighboring countries, encouraging them in their efforts to join the Euro-Atlantic community. The talks in Zagreb focused on Croatia’s role as a NATO partner, Croatia’s EU accession and the two countries’ economic relations.

Upon arriving at Zagreb Airport, Clinton was taken to Banski dvori to meet with Prime Minister Zoran Milanović. “Croatia has a huge potential and we are optimistic about your future”, Clinton said during the meeting that was also attended by Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusić. The US Secretary of State congratulated the Croatian government on the steps taken to stabilize the budget and said there was great interest by U.S. companies in investing in Croatia.

PM Milanović and Secretary Clinton also discussed Croatia’s forthcoming admission to the EU and the situation in the region. The prime minister underlined Croatia’s support for its neighbors’ Euro-Atlantic aspirations. “It is Croatia’s interest that its neighbors become a part of the European Union,” he quoted as saying. He depicted the EU as a word for stability. “You have decided to be part of the peaceful and free Europe and transatlantic community. You serve as an anchor in the region, a prosperous country which can be an example to others”, Secretary Clinton said, adding that she would like Zagreb to convey the lessons learned to its neighbors.

Speaking of the relations between the United States and Croatia, Secretary Clinton said the two countries were tied by friendship and being part of the same cultural circle, as well as, by a strong partnership in Afghanistan and the region. She added that the US had been supporting the Croatian people on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration for 20 years now. PM Milanovic thanked the United States for the assistance it has offered Croatia since it gained independence.

Welcome Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the new edition of “Croatia Monthly”! This has been an exciting period in which we have reaffirmed the strong partner-ship and close ties between Croatia and the United States. Secretary of State Clinton visited Zagreb for the first time in October, confirming support to Croatia as it makes its final steps towards the EU. Croatian Defense Minister Kotromanović’s visit to Washington provided an opportunity to further deepen already extensive bilateral relations in the defense field. In November, Croatia welcomed back home two acquitted generals, while at the same time avowing to provide justice to all victims of war. Three more countries ratified Croatia’s EU Accession Treaty, and our multilateral efforts were recognized through Croatia’s election to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

As always, we are pleased to bring you a variety of news covering upcoming Croatian cultural events in the U.S., short reports of the Embassy’s work and plentiful of sights, sounds and flavors of Croatia. I hope you will find all these inviting enough to explore Croatian culture and gastronomy on your own.

I wish you and your loved ones peaceful and joyous holidays. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2013!

Joško Paro
Croatian Defense Minister Kotromanović visits the U.S.

During his official visit to Washington D.C., Croatian Defense Minister Ante Kotromanović met on October 17, 2012 with U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta.

The two ministers discussed the U.S.-Croatian strategic alliance in the field of security and defense, the development of Croatia’s defense capabilities, bilateral cooperation in Southeast Europe and in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, namely issues related to the post-2014 timeframe.

Both countries expressed their satisfaction with respect to the agreement regarding NATO’s engagement in Afghanistan after 2014, with the focus of the mission shifting to training, mentoring and financing of Afghan Security Forces, in order for the Afghan government to gradually assume responsibility for security in the country.

Regarding Southeast Europe, the ministers confirmed the strategic interest of both Croatia and the United States in sustaining the stability and security of the region. The Croatian delegation stressed the importance of further U.S. engagement, while confirming Croatia’s strong support for a Euro-Atlantic perspective for all the countries of the region. Croatia remains committed to providing support and assistance to these countries on their path to Euro-Atlantic integration.

Minister Panetta praised the efforts of the Ministry of Defense in the modernization of Croatia’s Armed Forces in the midst of the financial crisis, as well as those of the Croatian leadership in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of Southeast Europe, stressing that Croatia is now a mentor and a leader in the promotion of regional initiatives.

Bilateral defense cooperation has been exceptional, manifesting primarily through cooperation in NATO, where the two countries jointly address global security challenges, from the promotion of stability in Southeast Europe to providing security in Afghanistan. Both countries confirmed at the meeting their interest of maintaining and expanding this cooperation. For Croatia, the United States is its main partner in the field of security and defense, which was also reiterated at the meeting.

As part of his visit to Washington, Defense Minister Kotromanović laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arlington Military Memorial Cemetery.
The Hague Tribunal Acquits two Croatian Generals

The Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on November 16, 2012 acquitted Croatian generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac and ordered their immediate release.

The Hague Tribunal Acquits two Croatian Generals

Croatia elected member of the UN ECOSOC

On 8 November 2012 Croatia was elected as a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the 2013-2015 period at a General Assembly session in New York.

Along with the Security Council and the General Assembly, ECOSOC is one of the main UN bodies, in charge of coordinating UN activities regarding international economic and social issues, as well as the issues of culture, education, health, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

ECOSOC comprises 54 UN member countries and operates through functional, regional and standing commissions and committees, special agencies, programs and funds, as well as ad hoc working groups and other expert bodies.

Croatia was already a member of the body in 2000-2002, chairing it in 2002. The new membership is an acknowledgement of Croatia's international position and reputation, as well as an opportunity to contribute to the promotion and implementation of economic and social policies important to the UN.

Croatia was elected alongside Albania, Benin, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Haiti, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Nepal, the Netherlands, San Marino, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan and the United States. Croatia's term begins on 1 January 2013 and ends on 31 December 2015.

Croatia's Foreign and European Affairs Ministry Vesna Pusic commented that "respect for international institutions and institutions in general is the only right way. Generals Gotovina and Markac are free and innocent people under the ruling of the court." The Hague tribunal's judgment establishes beyond doubt that generals Markac and Gotovina are innocent, the minister said, adding that the ruling did not mean amnesty for those sentenced for war crimes or that Croatia will abandon plans to prosecute war crimes suspects.

"I am very pleased with the Hague tribunal's ruling, which means that our generals are innocent, but I emphasize the further responsibility of the Croatian state to investigate what happened and to prosecute crimes that were committed," Croatian President Josipovic said in a statement following the announcement of the court's final ruling. "General Gotovina and General Markac have spent eight years in prison innocent, and this fact is not easy for them or for their families. But they have done it for Croatia and I, in my capacity as Commander in Chief of the Croatian Armed Forces, wish to thank them for the sacrifice they have made for their country," the President said. Josipovic said that the Appeals Chamber's "legal and just ruling has confirmed what we in Croatia have believed all along - that generals Gotovina and Markac are innocent, that the Croatian leadership and armed forces did not act as a joint criminal enterprise with the aim of expelling civilians, our fellow citizens of Serb ethnicity, that Croatia did not commit ethnic cleansing, and that our struggle for freedom was just and honorable. It remains our responsibility to take care of all victims of the war and to prosecute all individual crimes that were committed in the war. The Croatian state is not responsible for crimes committed by individuals, but is responsible for bringing every perpetrator to justice, regardless of who they are," Josipovic said.

Croatian Parliament Speaker Josip Leko said that by acquitting Croatian generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac, the ICTY confirmed that Croatia was fighting a just war of defense and liberation in which it respected all international laws and customs of war.

Commenting on the decision by the Appeals Chamber, Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic said he felt relieved. PM Milanovic recalled that it was a process that had lasted 17 years and that today's acquittal was important for the generals and their families, as well as for Croatia. "Croatia will redress those who were done wrong, and our thanks go to Markac and Gotovina for holding out so long," the Prime Minister said.

Croatia's term begins on 1 January 2013 and ends on 31 December 2015.
Croatia donates one million kuna worth of equipment to Afghan police

The donation worth one million kunas is part of the development assistance Croatia is offering to Afghan authorities

The Republic of Croatia donated to the Kabul Police Department uniforms and other equipment to be used in the training of Afghan police. The official handover was organized 29 November in Kabul by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs as the coordinator of international development cooperation policy, together with the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior.

The donation worth one million kunas (approximately $200,000) is part of the development assistance Croatia is offering Afghan authorities in ensuring political and economic stability, alongside assistance for the education of women and girls, the protection of reproductive health and stimulating women’s entrepreneurship. Afghanistan represents for Croatia a security and development priority, as well as a partner country in development cooperation.

Spain, Sweden and Greece ratify Croatia’s EU Treaty

Latest ratifications bring the total number to 19

The Spanish, Swedish and Greek parliaments ratified Croatia’s EU Treaty in the last period. So far, 19 of the 27 European Union member states have ratified the document.

Croatia is scheduled to join the EU on July 1, 2013.

An Agreement on Trade and Investment Signed Between Croatia and Illinois

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Croatia came into force on 11 November 2012 when it was signed by Illinois DCEO Director Mr. Adam Pollet. On behalf of Croatia, the MoU had been signed previously in Zagreb by Assistant Minister of Economy, Mr. Darko Lorenčić. Besides the resident Croatian Consul General Dr. Polić, several businessmen involved in trade with Croatia attended the signing ceremony in Chicago.

This agreement offers a strong framework for longer term strategic cooperation between Croatia and State of Illinois -- the fifth largest economy in the United States and the eighteenth largest economy in the world -- via proffering opportunities to present trade and investment potentials to large American companies. It facilitates joint participation in trade and investments projects, trade missions, fairs and other formats of specialized business gatherings.

The initiative for this MoU was born out of the spring 2011 visit by the President of the Republic of Croatia Prof. Dr. Ivo Josipović, the first visit ever by a Croatian President to Chicago and Illinois. It was completed through the joint efforts of the Consulate General of the Republic of Croatia in Chicago, the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Croatia.

Croatian Cultural Events in the U.S.

Zvonimir Mihanovic Exhibition, The Forbes Galleries, New York, NY

Zvonimir Mihanovic solo exhibition will be on display for over two months in the galleries of Forbes Magazines’ headquarters at 62 Fifth Ave, NY from Dec 12, 2012 through Feb 16, 2013. This prestigious show, titled “Serenity in Croatia”, reaches back 31 years, giving the viewer a full profile of Mihanovic's work. Ten available oil paintings, a few appealing new watercolors and some of his most prestigious originals from private collections will be on display. Mihanovic's distinctive style of painting, recognized by art critics as a particular expression of contemporary hyperrealism, places him among the most sought after and in-demand artists in the world today.

More information available at: www.mihanovic.com

Ana Vidović Concert, the International Conservatory of Music, Chevy Chase, MD, January 26, 2013, 8pm

Ana Vidovic comes from the small town of Karlovac near Zagreb, Croatia, and started playing guitar at the age of 5, and by 7 had given her first public performance. At the age of 11 she was performing internationally, and at 13 became the youngest student to attend the prestigious National Musical Academy in Zagreb where she studied with Professor Istvan Romer. Ana's reputation in Europe led to an invitation to study with Manuel Barrueco at the Peabody Conservatory where she graduated in 2005. Her international performance career includes recitals in New York, London, Paris, Vienna, Salzburg, Rome, Budapest, Warsaw, Tel Aviv, Oslo, Copenhagen, Toronto, Baltimore, San Francisco, Houston, Austin, Dallas, St. Louis and beyond.

More information available at: www.marlowguitar.org

Klapa Cambi “Sound of Dalmatia” 2013 Tour

Klapa Cambi, winner of the World Choir Championship in St. Petersburg, will showcase their unique vocal talent during their 2013 U.S. and Canada tour. For 25 years the group has stayed true to its core Croatian heritage and culture while bringing the authentic music of Dalmatia to an international spotlight. Their performance will take you through ancient Dalmatian cities and bring you closer to the beautiful Adriatic. Although unique and original, the repertoire of Klapa Cambi will be further enriched through performances alongside renowned American artists, creating a musical fusion between the two countries.


More information available at: www.scardonamusic.com
On 19 November 2012 Miljenko “Mike” Grgich along with several other American winemakers was honored at the Winemakers’ Dinner at the National Museum of American History for his contributions to American winemaking. Mike Grgich helped pioneer American winemaking through making significant breakthroughs in California winemaking techniques, including the use of cold sterilization and malolactic fermentation and the use of oak barrels for proper aging. His most celebrated achievement came in 1976 when the Chardonnay he crafted for Chateau Montelena beat the very best wines in France in the now famous blind tasting in Paris.

Mike Grgich’s success in America grew from his deep family winemaking roots in his native Croatia. The Grgich family owned a small winery and vineyard in southern Croatia, where every year his father, grandfather and great-grandfather made wine. Following his studies at the University of Zagreb he decided to travel to the United States and arrived in the Napa Valley in 1958 with his education and a small suitcase. He thrived in several wineries and in 1977, following his success in Paris, achieved his lifelong dream of owning his own vineyard. He then joined forces with Austin Hills and created the Grgich Hills Cellar at Rutherford.

In 2006 his winery switched to solar power and in 2007 the vineyard became completely estate grown and changed its name to Grgich Hills Estate. Mike Grgich, along with his daughter Violet and nephew Ivo Jeramez, continue to innovate but stay small and focused on ever improving the quality of the vineyards and wines coming from the Estate. The exhibition on American winemakers can be found on the ground floor of the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington DC, right next to Museum’s exhibit on Transforming the American Table 1950-2000 and Julia Child’s home kitchen.
Interview: Jeanne Oliver, author of the first edition of Lonely Planet’s Croatia guidebook

Seeing Croatia struggle to its feet after independence, put together an infrastructure and a tourist industry, then march confidently towards membership in the EU has been the most rewarding experience of my professional life.

Q: When and why did you decide to write about Croatia?

It wasn’t me that decided! When I was hired to write for Lonely Planet in 1996, they asked me where I would like to go. I chose . . . Greece, remarking that I liked sea and islands and coastline. They told me that Greece was already assigned but suggested Croatia. At the time, everything I heard about Croatia was war, war, war and then peace but I was game. It seemed like a grand adventure and I was eager to see for myself the country I had heard so much about. Also my friends were so impressed with my “bravery!” “No, no. The war ended in 1995”, I kept reassuring everyone. I updated the Croatia chapter of Mediterranean Europe on a shoestring in 1996 and returned in 1998 to research and write the first edition of Lonely Planet’s Croatia guidebook followed by the three succeeding editions. When I decided to launch a website in 2005, it seemed natural to choose Croatia as I already had so much experience covering the country.

Q: What were your first impressions of the country?

Good and bad. On the one hand, there were still visible reminders of the war. The Esplanade Hotel in Zagreb had peacekeepers and officials coming and going. Zadar still had sandbags around the buildings and Dubrovnik had yet to repair all its roofs. Worse, from Istria all down the coast, people were morose and demoralized. The disruptions provoked by the war were still fresh in people’s minds. On the other hand, the sheer physical beauty of the country was staggering. And there were no other tourists! Well, one. In Zadar, the chess player Gary Kasparov showed his support by organizing and playing in a local chess tournament. It was clear that a lot of work needed to be done to repair the tourism infrastructure, especially the hotels, but it was equally clear that once it was repaired, Croatia was going to be a massive destination.

Q: What did you find to be the most unique aspect of Croatian tourism?

The prevalence and quality of private accommodation is unparalleled in the Mediterranean. It offers the opportunity to interact with local life in a way that hotels can’t. Most families who have constructed and rented out apartments seem highly invested materially and emotionally in making their guests comfortable and introducing them to Croatian culture. I’ve stayed in a lot of private accommodation over the years which has greatly enhanced my experience of the country.

Q: How often do you travel to Croatia today?

Every year. Seeing Croatia struggle to its feet after independence, put together an infrastructure and a tourist industry then march confidently towards membership in the EU has been the most rewarding experience of my professional life.

Q: Do you speak Croatian?

I’m so sorry that I don’t. I can mutter some niceties but to really speak the language I would have to immerse myself in it. Maybe I should move to Croatia!
Klapa singing inscribed on UNESCO Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Croatia has 12 elements inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Klapa singing, a form of traditional Croatian a cappella singing, was inscribed on the Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage, established by UNESCO, at the 7th meeting of the intergovernmental committee for intangible cultural heritage which was held in Paris from December 3 to 7, 2012.

Klapa singing is a multipart singing tradition of the southern Croatian region of Dalmatia. Multipart singing, a cappella homophonic singing, oral tradition and simple music making are its main features. The leader of each singing group is the first tenor, followed by several tenor, baritone and bass voices. During performances, the singers stand in a tight semicircle. The first tenor starts the singing and is followed by the others. The main aim is to achieve the best possible blend of voices. Technically, klapa singers express their mood by means of open guttural, nasal sotto voce and falsetto singing, usually in high-pitched tessitura. Another feature is the ability to sing freely, without the help of notation.

Topics of klapa songs usually deal with love, life situations, and the environment in which they live. Bearers and practitioners are skilled amateurs who inherit the tradition from their predecessors. Their ages vary with many younger people singing with older singers. In ‘traditional klapa’, knowledge is transferred orally. ‘Festival klapa’ is more formally organized with a focus on performance and presentation. In ‘modern klapa’, young singers gain experience by attending performances and listening to recordings. Local communities see klapa singing as a central marker of their musical identity, incorporating respect for diversity, creativity and communication.

Presenting the Croatian Oscar Candidate: 'Vegetarian Cannibal'

“Vegetarian Cannibal”, a film directed by Branko Schmidt and produced by Telefilm, will represent Croatian cinema in the selection process of the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the Oscar award in the Best Foreign Film category. On October 8, 2012 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced the final list of eligible submissions, with a record number of 71 films. The final nominees for this prestigious American film award will be announced on 15 January 2013. This year’s 85th Oscar ceremony takes place in Hollywood on 24 February 2013.

“Vegetarian Cannibal” is a contemporary story about a successful, but immoral and corrupt gynecologist (Rene Bitorajac), who accomplishes his ambitions with the help of the Zagreb mafia. The film is based on the novel by Ivo Balenović, with whom Schmidt also collaborated on his previous film Metastases.

At this year’s Pula Film Festival the film won five Golden Arenas, including those for best director and best actor (Rene Bitorajac). It also took part in the official selection of the renowned Moscow International Film Festival.

Ultra Music Festival announces five-year residency in Croatia

Starting next summer, Ultra Music Festival will touch down in Croatia from July 12-14th, where it will remain for the next five years. The festival is expected to attract over 60,000 visitors yearly. The lineup features DJ superstars Avicii, Carl Cox and Armin Van Buuren.

One of the world’s leading organizers of electronic music festivals, Ultra Worldwide of the United States, has chosen Croatia among 16 European countries for its first European festival.

The Ultra Europe festival was announced in the presence of Tourism Minister Veljko Ostojic at a press conference in Zagreb in late November when the festival organizers, Ultra Worldwide and Croatia’s Adria MM, signed a five-year cooperation agreement. Ostojic said that his ministry unequivocally supported such major events because they would help change the stereotyped image of Croatia and its tourism into “tourism of experience and emotion”.

The festival will take place specifically at Split’s Poljud Stadium for the first two days, before moving over to the Hotel Amfora Grand Beach Resort on the island of Hvar for the final day. The lineup features DJ superstars Avicii, Carl Cox and Armin Van Buuren. Ultra Worldwide already anticipates 60,000 attendees and plans to stream the three days through UMF TV and UMF Radio.

“Electronic music is one of the most popular and fastest growing genres in the world, and the Ultra Music Festival has been recognized as one of the leading festivals of that genre,” Russell Faibisch, the Founder, Executive Producer and CEO of Ultra Music Festival and Ultra Worldwide writes. “Taking into consideration the highly developed music scene in Croatia and the excellent reputation of Split and Hvar as top tourist destinations, the decision to bring Ultra Music Festival and the incredible experience it has to offer to Croatia – in the form of Ultra Europe – was an easy one to make. We strongly believe that electronic music fans are acutely aware of what Ultra Music Festival represents and will come in great numbers to share this amazing experience in both Split and Hvar this July”.

Early bird tickets for the first two days, priced at £40, go on sale December 5th exclusively at Ultra Europe.com.
Croatian Football Federation centennial

FIFA President Joseph S. Blatter attended the festivities to mark the 100th anniversary of the Croatian Football Federation in Zagreb

FIFA President Joseph Blatter attended the festivities to mark the 100th anniversary of the Croatian Football Federation in Zagreb on December 4, 2012.

Held in the Croatian National Theatre, the ceremony was also attended by Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanović, the UEFA President and FIFA Vice-President Michel Platini and the President of the Croatian Football Federation Davor Šuker. Before the Centennial ceremony, the FIFA President was received by the President of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo Josipović.

In his speech at the ceremony, President Blatter congratulated “a historic day for Croatian football” to “all those who have helped build its history, development and success”.

He also thanked Croatian football “for what it has brought to the development of the game internationally and wished it the very best for the years to come.”

The Croatian Football Federation has been chaired by former star striker Davor Šuker since July 2012. Šuker was capped 68 times with the Croatian national team, scoring 45 goals.

Croatia are currently second in their qualifying group for the FIFA World Cup Brazil 2014. Croatia participated in three FIFA World Cups to date (1998, 2002 and 2006). It recorded its biggest success in 1998 in France with an impressive bronze medal.

Croatia received Travel Agents Choice Award as an Upcoming Holiday Destination

Travel Agents Choice Awards is awarded by Company BMI Publishing Limited, publisher of the leading British travel magazine Selling Long Haul, and is the only tourism award for which only tourism professionals get to vote

At a press conference, which was organized on the first day of one of the most important tourism fairs, the World Travel Market in London (November 5-8, 2012), the Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia, Veljko Ostojić and director of the Croatian National Tourist Board, Meri Matesic, were presented with the Travel's Agents' Choice Award for 2012 in the category "Up and Coming Short Haul Destinations".

The award for best upcoming short haul destination is another great recognition of Croatia's most successful season to date, but also a confirmation of an upturn in popularity of Croatia as a desirable tourist destination in the UK market, which this year showed a rise in the number of guests by 20% year after year. This rise is likely to continue next year by 5% to 10%, based on the announcements of tour operators and airline companies. British Airways will begin operating the London-Zagreb flight as of 9 December and continue offering it throughout the year. Also, the British Association of Travel Agents - ABTA, which brings together about 6,000 members, chose Croatia to host its annual conference in 2013. The conference will be held in October next year in Dubrovnik and will gather as many as 700 top experts from the tourism sector of Great Britain and influential representatives of travel agencies.

“Croatia – New Star of the Mediterranean”, “Discovery of the Mediterranean”, “Continental Hit-Destination in Europe”, are just some of the titles gracing the covers of catalogues of some of the largest tour operators in the world (Mega Agencies such as TUI, Neckermann and Thomas Cook) as Croatia is increasingly positioned ahead of all other Mediterranean destinations. Flights into Croatia from all over Europe have also been beefed up in anticipation of the expected increase in arrivals next summer. Recently air companies such as British Airways, EasyJet, RyanAir, Monarch and Finnair all announced increased services into Croatia.

‘Ode to Joy’ wins Grand Prix CIFFT

‘Ode to Joy’, the multi award winning film by the Croatian National Tourist Board, was named best promotional tourist film at the Grand Prix CIFFT (Comité International des Festivals du Film Touristique) in Vienna. The film is part of a promotional campaign by the Croatian National Tourist Board, under the slogan “Croatia – the new tourism star of the European Union.”

The video is available here.

Where is Croatia? In Yahoo Top 10 searches for 2012

Yahoo announced it most popular search engine requests for 2012 with a surprising entry coming in at number 7 on the “Where is...?” list.

Croatia was the 7th most searched for item with the prefix “Where is” on the internet giant search engines for 2012.
Cravat Day celebrated in Croatia

At the suggestion of the Academia Cravatica, the Cravat Day was declared by the Croatian Parliament in 2008, and has been celebrated since in Croatia and abroad on 18 October

For the fifth year in a row, Academia Cravatica and the Zagreb Tourist Board have organized a ceremony with the performance of the Cravat-regiment on St. Mark’s Square in Zagreb.

Treat Yourself with Advent in Zagreb

Apart from the excellent outdoor program on the main city square, Zagreb’s citizens and their guests who traditionally spend the Advent season in Zagreb will be able to enjoy numerous concerts, theater performances, exhibitions and various other kinds of festive happenings and events tied to the merriment of the most joyous month of the year.

Advent in the Heart of Zagreb is a series of holiday events held on the city’s squares, bringing the spirit of Advent and Christmas to guests and citizens of Zagreb through a rich musical and artistic program. Interested citizens, guests and passers-by can enjoy various programs by numerous cultural societies, children’s choirs, drama ensembles, dance groups and music bands, or shop at fairs tailored for the occasion. Over the last few years, the concept of Advent in Zagreb has surpassed the holiday season, making entire winters in the Croatian capital livelier and warmer than ever before, with entertainment found literally on every corner of most streets and squares across the city centre.

Advent in Zagreb begins on 1 December, with the traditional lighting of the first Advent candle in the central city square of Ban Josip Jelacic. As of that date, numerous Christmas events will take place throughout the city, culminating with a big New Year’s party.

Apart from many diverse programs, which will take place on the squares and streets across the city, the Christmas atmosphere will be complemented by a museum and theatre program, as well as concerts in Zagreb’s churches, the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall and entertainment programs at Arena Zagreb, while young-sters will enjoy riding a merry Christmas tram.

Restaurateurs are as well prepared for the holiday season as ever. This year, however, the holiday staples will be complemented by some very popular original delicacies, including the famous štrukle (cheese filled pastry). There will also be presentations and tastings of various other kinds of authentic Croatian foods, for example the renowned Dalmatian prosciutto and Slavonian kulen (a spicy dry-cured sausage). All of the presentations will be accompanied by cultural events and performances by folklore groups from all over Croatia.

More information regarding the advent events in Zagreb can be found online at http://www.adventzagreb.com.
Opatija's Chocolate Festival

There is no sweeter holiday than this!

For several years now, at the beginning of December, Opatija is traditionally dedicated to the sweet scent of chocolate which is celebrated every year during the Chocolate Festival. Chocolate isn’t only a delicacy that everyone enjoys…. It is also a healthy and healing nutrient that reduces stress, helps in the prevention of heart diseases, strengthens the immune system, acts as an antidepressant, but is also used as an aphrodisiac. The festival is part of the “Winter in Opatija” project and this year’s edition took place from the 7th to the 9th of December, with many promotions and events extending through the entire month.

Chocolate lovers will once again have the opportunity to sample a wide range of their favorite specialties or enjoy a variety of chocolate-based beauty treatments during the sixth edition of the festival. Every year, the festival has some special surprise to offer, but the taste that remains is always the same – sweet chocolate fragrance, spiced up with some special enjoyment and aromas.

During the festival, which takes place in numerous Opatija hotels, cafés and wellness centers, “chococolics” had the chance to treat all the senses at various tastings, competitions, exhibitions, film screenings and other attractive events related to chocolate. As always, the festival also included the making of the biggest chocolate cake. For those interested in some special experience, there were a series of sweet wellness packages such as exclusive chocolate body treatments, aroma hydro massage baths, facial treatments with chocolate-based products, and much more. Special entertainment programs for children have been organized and together with the Catering school Opatija educational programs will include workshops in preparing and making chocolate confectionery and delicacies. All hoteliers and restaurateurs from Opatija will be included in the event with their programs.

If you are a fan of chocolate, be sure not to miss the chance to visit Opatija in December. In addition to a variety of chocolate products, the town’s extensive gastronomic offer will include some special surprises, like classical specialties enriched with chocolate or imaginative combinations of various aromas.

And Croatia is...

...the land of truffles

Culinary chefs agree upon one thing only: the truffle should be placed at the very top of the gastronomic delicacies list. The truffle is a supreme delicacy that had been enjoyed by Mesopotamian rulers 4000 years ago, and it is still one of the most prestigious foodstuffs in world gastronomy. This intense flavor royal mushroom was known to the ancient Greeks and Roman emperors, and was also served at the French court and among the Austro-Hungarian aristocracy.

The truffle is a mysterious, unique and expensive tuber, completely concealed underground. It does not dispose of a plant suspended above the ground and therefore, no human being is able to spot it, except for a well-trained dog tracing it by smell. It is very rare and it grows only in several locations in Europe - in some parts of France and Italy and in the Istrian peninsula of Croatia.

So, if you are looking for truffles, Istria is the place to go! The land of our heart-shaped peninsula consists of two types of soil texture; the intensely red one in the coastal area and the grey, clayish one in its central part. The truffle grows exactly in this grey soil, inside the Istrian truffle ‘Bermuda’ triangle between Pazin, Buzet and Buzet, with its epicenter being in the dump Motovun forest constantly moistened by the Mirna river flowing through its woods. To be even more precise, it is mainly spotted in the County District of Opatija, through the town of Livade, and in the Buzet area, where Buzet has already been renowned as the “Truffle Place”. Now you know!

The white Istrian truffle is one of the most highly appraised truffle species in the world. In order to promote its origins and delicacy, “Truffle days in Istria” are organized every year. October is the top season of the white truffle, which is also the most expensive and the most valuable truffle. At that time, numerous events are held every weekend to celebrate this indisputable king of mushrooms in Livade, a well-known truffles centre near Motovun. But, even before and after this period, throughout most of the autumn, truffles lives in the rhythm of truffles with an abundance of festivities dedicated to this noble mushroom.

Guests who come from the whole region are presented with typical truffle dishes: faji, pljukanci, gnocchi, fritada and various meat combinations. There are also many exhibitions and fairs, with plenty of excellent opportunities to meet the world of this magical, unusual tuber known for its aphrodisiac features.

So, in case you have not already done so, we invite you to get pass looking at truffle as an odd potato-like bulb with a highly unpleasant smell. Once you do, you get used to it and its culinary uniqueness, becoming for once and for all its true and eternal admirer. One may even say you tend to get addicted to it as one does to any other worldly vice.
**Speaking of Facts: Croatia’s National Parks**

Croatia is one of the ecologically best preserved parts of Europe, boasting with as many as eight national parks in so small an area! Places of exceptional beauty offer tranquility at the nature’s best that has been preserved over centuries and for generations to come. These are the crown jewels of Croatia:

**Plitvice Lakes** - This is Croatia’s best known national park and the one that is listed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage sites. The main attractions of this park, unique in the world, are the 16 small lakes joined by waterfalls created by the sedimentation of travertine, a special type of limestone. Plitvice national park encompasses the source of the river Korana, located in the area surrounded by dense forests of beech, fir and spruce. There are also several caves in the park, as well as springs and flowering meadows. The brown bear stands out as one of many protected animal species. The popularity of this park is also boosted by the special means of transport used to ferry visitors around: the panoramic electric trains and the noiseless electric-powered boats. It is impossible to say whether the park is more beautiful in the spring, when the flowers in its meadows are in full bloom and when the trees have turned green again, or when the riot of autumn colors is reflected in the waters of the lakes, or indeed during the winter calm, when ice petrifies the waterfalls and when the surrounding trees are heavily laden with snow. By a network of paths, visitors can get around and access the numerous waterfalls and the rocky lake shores easily.

**Kornati Archipelago** - The Kornati archipelago consists of 140 uninhabited islands, islets and reefs comprising an area of only 70 km². They are famous for the peculiar shapes of reefs and crags but particularly for their high cliffs. There are those who claim that the number of the smaller islands is even greater, since an old saying says: “As is the number of days in a year, so is the number of the Kornati islands”. The main island Kornat is accounted for the largest part of the park and the whole island group is named after it. Due to the dangers involved in sailing through this maze of stone and sea, there are many old lighthouses on Kornati islands, which today are destinations for Robinson-Crusoe-want-to-be. The biggest admirers of Kornati are yachtsmen, who find in this area, that which they seek most: a sun soaked warren of sea and islands set in unspoiled nature.

**Risnjak** - This mountain massif was named after the lynx, in Croatian ris, its most popular inhabitant. Being located where the Alps meet the Dinaric Range and where the Mediterranean gradually gives way to the Pannonia Plain, it combines almost all the forest types of the areas and contains numerous plant and animal species. Nature lovers come to Risnjak for the beauty of the mountains, forests, waters and karst. The most frequent visitors are mountaineers, who find the highest peak of the massif the most rewarding challenge. In addition to lynx, the symbol of the mountain, there are also brown bears, martens and dormice. Risnjak is also famous for its fantastic views of the islands in the Kvarner Bay.

**Brijuni Archipelago** - Brijuni, a group of islands comprising of two large and twelve smaller isles, are strung along Istria’s south western coast not far from Pula. Their surface area is barely seven km², but together with the surrounding sea the total area of the park is 34 km². Brijuni are renowned for its indented nature and the unspoiled Mediterranean vegetation, but the islands also boast an invaluable cultural heritage dating from the Roman and Byzantine times, which alongside with the outstanding natural beauty, has made them a popular holiday destination among the world statesmen and the aristocracy. Although not inhabited, because of the numerous tourists who are ferried over from the mainland by boat, there are people on the islands all year round. Veliki Brijun offers accommodation in three small hotels, enabling their guests to savour an atmosphere of peace while being surrounded by beautiful nature and having the tourist flurry of Pula within easy reach. The site of the first golf course in Croatia is on Brijuni. Despite the numerous visitors, the landscape has been well preserved, as proved by a large number of birds which winter on the islands.

**Island of Mljet** - Situated on the island of the same name, Mljet National Park is the most important protected area of the Dalmatian south. The park covers the western part of the island, which many regard as the most alluring in the Adriatic, full of lush and varied Mediterranean vegetation. The park includes two deep bays which, due to their extremely narrow links with the sea, are regarded as and indeed named lakes: the Great Lake and the Small Lake. Mljet is also very rich in cultural heritage, the most prominent example being the complex of the 12th century Benedictine monastery. The monastery is located on a small island in the middle of the Great Lake and is set in a lush park. Over the course of centuries, numerous chronicles, dissertations and other literary works have been written here. Located within the monastery is the church of St Mary.

**Paklenica** - The greatest natural jewel of the Zadar area is Paklenica National Park, which covers the most attractive parts of the southern Velebit. Its most striking features are two forbidding gorges - Velika and Mala Paklenica. The park abounds with peculiar karstic forms, caves and other natural features, while due to its climate conditions, lush variety of flora and fauna has been preserved. Despite its wild nature, Paklenica is easily accessible due to its proximity to the Adriatic highway and the motorway. The vistas of Velebit rising above the resort of Starigrad-Paklenica, which are at once intimidating and alluring, beckon those seeking light-hearted adventure. Through the wild ruggedness of Velika Paklenica, where highland women once carried salt on their backs from the coast and brought wheat from the fertile hinterland of Lika, today runs a comfortable hiking trail.

**Krka waterfalls** - The largest part of this amazing river’s course is the national park, which in addition to its natural phenomena abounds with cultural and historical monuments. The most outstanding of these is the Franciscan monastery on the tiny island of Visovac, set in the middle of the lake widening in the river like a precious stone. Within the monastery there is a picture gallery and a church, origins of which are traced back to the 14th century. However, the main attraction of Krka National Park lies in its seven waterfalls. The widest of these is Roški slap, although Skradinski buk is the biggest and most well known.

**Northern Velebit** - Located in the peak area of the northernmost part of the mountain and extending over 109 km², the national park is rich in exceptional features: the cone like karstic formations known as Hajdučki kukovi and Rozanski kukovi, the botanical garden set in a natural environment, and the pothole Lukana jama (Luka’s pothole). That is why Croatian mountaineers regard this area as the most precious jewel among all of the Croatia’s mountains.
Photo of the Month

Each month we will publish a photo of Croatia taken by one of the millions of foreign tourist that discover “The Mediterranean as it once was” every year.

For more of these, check out the official Facebook page of Croatia “Love Croatia” or visit www.croatia.hr

This month’s photo comes from Hrvatsko Zagorje, where the mild hills have welcomed the first snow of the year. Courtesy of Dunja Habek. Enjoy!

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Merry Christmas!
Happy New Year!