

CROATIA'S NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Spend a week or two on Croatia's up-and-coming Dalmatian Coast and you'll have no trouble finding 101 reasons to go back. In the meantime, GEORGIA ANDERSON shortlists five...



1 ADRIATIC BEAUTY

Pockets of beaches are dotted along the coast, hundreds of offshore islands float in a wash of blue, and dramatic mountains frame vine-covered hillsides. Put simply, this stretch of Croatian seaside is achingly pretty. But it doesn't trade on its looks alone. Summers here unfold in chic bars and restaurants and at must-do music festivals. And the setting is perfect for mixing beach time with exploring, as some of the country's most striking towns and 'ooh'-inducing scenery are within easy reach by boat or hire car. You don't have to take our word for things, either – VIPs tack in here by the yacht-full. And anywhere that counts Beyoncé, Prince Harry and Brad Pitt among its clientele is clearly doing something right.

2 TOWNS WITH CHARACTER

On the west coast of Croatia, Dalmatia sits between ancient Pula, in the north, and the Pearl of the Adriatic, Dubrovnik, in the south. But unlike its well-trodden neighbours, this stretch of the mainland is off the radar for all but the most travel-savvy British holidaymaker. It kicks off with the old town of Sibenik, where Medieval alleyways lead to café-lined squares and a UNESCO-listed Renaissance cathedral. Further down the coast you'll find sassy, sun-kissed Split

– one of Croatia's biggest towns and prettiest cityscapes, where modern restaurants and shops buzz within ancient old walls. South of Split the coastline spills into the mountainous beach town of Makarska, where the pine-edged beaches and calm, island-flecked waters are the stuff Croatian postcards are made of.

3 PICTURE-PERFECT COVES

For a beach holiday, you'll want to check in somewhere on the mainland. You can walk between coves flanked by mountains on one side and the twinkling Adriatic on the other. Get behind the wheel and you've got the pick of the whole coastline and its pretty, interlinked white-shingle stretches. These sun spots are primed for lounging, picnicking and, if you're patient, even dolphin spotting. They're also washed by some of the cleanest seas in the Med, so the warm, blue-hued waters are as good for no-filter Instagramming as they are for swimming.

4 SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVALS

Croatia's live music scene has exploded in recent years – and nowhere more so than the Dalmatian Coast and its northern neighbours. Relaxed crowds and all-summer-long sunshine have made it one of the most exciting festival

destinations in Europe, where headliners perform in venues as diverse as forest clearings and converted monasteries. Party island, Hvar, hosted FOR in July – an exclusive boutique festival where revellers could catch intimate performances from big-name acts like Mark Ronson, before partying on the beach until the sun came up. At the other end of the scale, dance acts Disclosure and David Guetta led a roll-call of superstar DJs at Ultra Europe in June, held over three days in a 10,000-seater stadium in Split.

5 A-LIST ISLANDS

Hundreds of islands dot the Dalmatian Coast, each one with its own charm. And ferries link the mainland's coastal resorts to dozens of them. Depending on where you drop anchor, you can explore secret coves, slow-paced fishing villages, or historical ruins buried in olive groves. Or, if you want a taste of celeb-endorsed nightlife, head for Hvar. This place is a regular on lists of the World's Best Islands in glossy travel mags, and it's not hard to see why. The island is blanketed with lavender during the summer months and its centre, Hvar Town, is a maze of Venetian architecture and Medieval streets. But it's the palm-lined marina and the chic bars and restaurants along it that draw in the notoriously glamorous crowd.

CHECK IN...



ADRIATIC BEACH BY KARISMA

This luxury adults-only hotel sits at the foot of a mountain close to the heart of Makarska. It's brand new for May 2015, and will boast an infinity pool, a mojito bar, and widescreen views of the Adriatic.



SOLARIS HOTEL ANDRIJA

Kids are treated like VIPs at this hotel in Sibenik, which bagged a 2014 TripAdvisor 'best for families' award. An under-the-sea theme runs throughout – from the pirate ship mini golf, to the giant octopus that scales one of the buildings.



THOMSON CELEBRATION

Thomson Celebration's latest cruise collection launches from Dubrovnik and ticks off the Dalmatian Coast's highlights. There are four itineraries, including Taste of the Adriatic, which calls in at Hvar island.