

**Chelmsford U3A
Travel Group
Northern Croatia
16th to 19th June 2019**



Fourteen of us set out for this Riviera Travel trip which featured, from Stansted, a three night stay in Zagreb and four nights in Istria, the area in the north-west corner of the country. The party comprised four couples and six other travellers.

We flew into Pula which meant a lengthy transfer to the country's capital but it was smoothly undertaken. The large city hotel was exactly that with many coach parties coming and going and thus a little frantic and impersonal at times. We had time to wander around the city during the balance of the first day. It is a city where buildings and road layout are influenced by its Austro-Hungarian past but is modern in many ways with a smart tram system, shops and squares and sights and sites as befitting a capital city. Zagreb is geographically nearer Vienna (and Munich for that matter) than it is to Dubrovnik in Croatia's far south. The city is a less grand version of the Austrian capital, rather than having a great deal in common with the southern coastal resort. Croatia itself has an interesting story and our tour manager shared stories and opinions regarding recent and not so recent history as well as sharing details of how Croatians live their lives today

On our first full day we had a walking tour of the city's main historical sites plus time to ourselves with plenty of chances for wandering about, photos and, well, eating. It was difficult to get used to some of the Croatian ways; it seems that you can buy pastries and eat them in places serving only coffee etc. and buy coffees and consume them in places serving only pastries. Most of us seemed to manage.

The next day saw us off to Varazdin, once the Croatian capital and visited a nationally famous basilica, Marija Bistrica, on the way.

The following day we went off to Istria via the UNESCO-recognised Plitvicka Lakes, an area of cliffs, waterfalls and lakes, a beautiful place with startling views. The day's final destination was the coastal resort of Opatija, another community dotted with former Imperial palaces and villas, not unlike when mixed with the lush vegetation, the communities around the Italian Lakes which, of course, also have an Austro-Hungarian heritage. The hotel, in Ičići around a mile or so from the town, was a modern two-storey building next to the sea and we all had balconies and sea views.

From Opatija we had trips to Pula where, among other things, we visited the Roman amphitheatre, the sixth largest such structure in the world. We also went to Rovinj, a charming resort with history to explore and appreciate; and to pretty Krk Town on Krk island where there was a final day wine tasting opportunity. We also had a day with nothing arranged and most spent a delightful day wandering via a coast hugging boardwalk the marina front of Opatija.