

Day 1 – Adriatic Vacation – September 13th

Today Marcia and Jim and Marie and Kal depart on a new adventure. Marcia and Marie are sisters and the four of us enjoy traveling together. In fact, this is the 11th international trip that we've taken together over the past eight years. This trip will focus on a tour of the Democratic Republic of Croatia which is situated in southern Europe east of Italy on the Adriatic Sea. We will be on an organized 13 day tour of Croatia that ends with 2 days in Venice, Italy. Then the four



of us will rent a car and drive north from Venice into the Dolomite Mountains of northeast Italy for 5 days of hiking and exploration.

Why did we pick Croatia? The four of us normally "vote" on where our next vacation will be, and this time it was Kal and Marie's turn to take the lead. They had viewed a show on PBS by the travel writer Rick Steeves and were impressed with the history and beauty of Croatia. Subsequent research confirmed to us that this would be a good choice. Croatia has only recently become a popular tourist destination as it was an "independent" communist country from 1945 through 1990 and then went through a five year war of independence from Yugoslavia (called *The Homeland War* in Croatia). Today it is a very popular and economical summer destination for Europeans and becoming more popular with Americans. We felt we'd see and learn more and also probably save money if we signed up for an organized tour. After research, we agreed on the tour company *Odyseys Unlimited* out of Boston. We have enjoyed two previous tours with this company and were always impressed with the Tour Directors, itinerary, accommodations, included meals and overall value. Looking to extend our time in Europe we added the independent trip to the Dolomites for the scenery and hiking.

Our afternoon United Airlines flights from Albany NY and Dayton OH get us to Washington Dulles airport at 4PM. At 5:30PM we board a 90% full Lufthansa plane for an overnight flight to Frankfurt, Germany. We are seated in the economy section of a brand new Boeing 747-800. Lufthansa has just purchased three of this new design and the plane we are in just entered service this summer. The 747-800 is 30 feet longer than the older 747-400, making it the longest commercial airliner in service. The seats are quite comfortable and back of the seats in front of us contain a great little video system that allow us to watch probably 100 movies and shows "on demand". We take off from Washington at



6PM, then immediately set our watches ahead 6 hours to midnight so that we are on Germany and Croatia time. Tomorrow we will land in Germany.

Day 2 – Adriatic Vacation – September 14th

Our 2nd day of vacation starts as our airplane is over the Atlantic Ocean midway between Washington and Frankfurt, Germany on our way to our destination of Zagreb, Croatia.

We have learned that Croatia has a population of 4-1/2 million (although 8 million Croats live outside of Croatia) and covers a land area of 35,205 square miles...a little larger than Florida. Croatia has an amazing 3200 miles of coastline, 2/3rds of which belong to islands, cliffs and reefs. Croatia controls 1185 islands in the Adriatic but only about 50 are

populated. The vast majority of the population is Croatian and is of Slavic origin. The main language is Croatian and religion is Roman Catholic. The currency is the Kuna (one Kuna is equal to about \$.18). Croatia's democratic government has applied for membership in the European Union and Euro Zone and expects to be accepted next June.

Croatia has a rich history and interesting monuments and architecture as the area has been ruled thru the ages by the Greeks, Romans, Charlemagne, Venice, the Byzantine Emperors, the Turks and the Austrian Habsburgs. At the end of World War One Croatia became part of Yugoslavia. While all the regions of Yugoslavia were populated by decedents of the same original southern Slavic tribes, the Croatians are Roman Catholics, the Serbians Orthodox and Bosnians Muslim. After World War II Josef Tito made the country an "independent communist state" and held the country together until his death in 1980. Croatia declared its independence in 1991, prompting a Serbian invasion and war (and the subsequent Serbian invasion of Bosnia and the massacres, resulting in UN and USA intervention). Croatia was finally totally liberated in 1996. On our tour we expect to see areas still showing the damage of the war with Serbia.

Shortly after sunrise we land in Frankfurt, clear customs and transfer to a waiting lounge to board our final flight, a 10AM Air Croatia flight to Zagreb. This gives us a chance to meet and chat with some of the other folks who will be on our tour, easily identified by the *Odysseys Unlimited* baggage tags on their carry-ons.

We land in Zagreb at 12:30PM, about an hour late due to some paperwork and luggage issues. Our flight on a nearly full AirBus A320 is fine with some nice views of the snow covered Austrian Alps.



It is overcast in Zagreb with occasional drizzle but the weather is forecast to be getting better. We meet our Tour Director, Sandra Bandera, and are transported to our hotel for the next two nights, the Regent Esplanade. We are looking forward to staying at this hotel, as we know it was built in 1925 to house travelers on the Orient Express and is considered to be Zagreb's premier hotel and one of its best known buildings. We find our rooms most comfortable. As none of us really slept on the overnight flight we now take the opportunity to rest up for tonight's information meeting and dinner at the hotel.



Our whole tour group meets at 6PM for a briefing and we find that there will only be 22 folks in our group, all from the USA. Our Tour Director, Sandra, tells us about her background and then asks each of us to talk a bit about ourselves and why we are on this trip. This proves to be an effective way for all of us to initially get to know each other.

We next have a great dinner in a private room in the hotel....great food: a Croatian appetizer specialty of Esplanade Strukli, entre of pan roasted salmon and a special desert of Panna Cotta with essence of coffee. We have great conversations with our fellow travelers. Off to a good night's sleep.

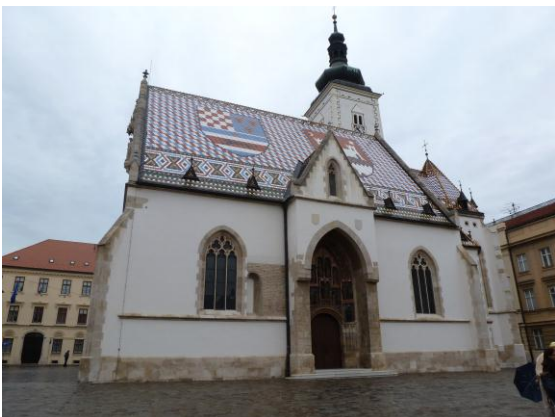
Day 3 – Adriatic Vacation – September 15th



This morning we wake up in Croatia feeling much better after our first full night of sleep in Europe. A quick breakfast and we board a full size tour bus (ample for our small group of 22) and start our City Tour. It is overcast and a little cool with occasional drizzle. We have a nice young lady as our “local guide” in addition to our Tour Director Sandra.

We drive around the central area of Zagreb and get a good overview of the historical buildings. Zagreb is the capital of Croatia and has a population of 750,000. While many of the old buildings are rather nice, I think that 50 years of communist rule (where private property was abolished, leading to what you would expect to happen to “shared Property”) and then the 1990 Independence (Homeland) War have left this city looking just a little worn ...I am sure nothing but improvements wait in the future. We next stop for a walking tour of the Mirogoj Park Cemetery where over 300,000 folks are buried, many in beautiful mausoleums and graves. We then drive to Upper Town and start another walking tour. We see St. Mark's church which was originally built in the 13th

century. Its roof tiles show the coats of arms of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia of the left and Zagreb on the right.



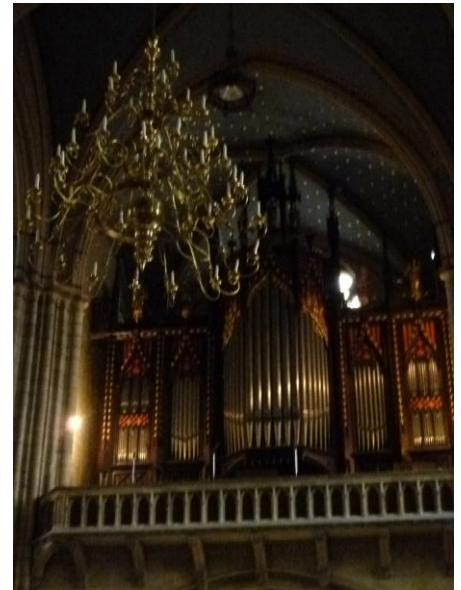
We continue our walk past government buildings and historic structures before reaching the Zagreb Cathedral. The cathedral was first built in 1217 and consecrated by King Andrew II on his way to the 5th Crusade. It was sacked by the Tartars and rebuilt and expanded several times. A severe earthquake in 1880 led to another major rebuilding. We enter this gothic structure and get to hear the 6000 tube pipe organ being played. We comment on the three massive chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and are told that they were a gift from a



Croat that moved to the USA and made his fortune. When he was redecorating his gambling casino in 2000 he sent the three chandeliers he was replacing to the cathedral!

By now the weather has started clearing. We walk thru the Dolac open-air food and produce market to the main square where we are entertained by a short parade of soldiers representing heroes from the 17th century. Now we have free time for the rest of the day. The four of us walk back to the farmers

market. Marcia comments on how cute a young child is with his balloon. He then hops out of his stroller and hits her with his balloon, much to the dismay of his mother! Marcia still thought he was very cute. By now the skies were clear and we were enjoying brilliant sunshine.



Before our trip Marcia had commented to a neighbor about where we were planning to travel. Our neighbor, Laura, said that she had an old friend from Texas who was now a chef at a restaurant in Zagreb and that we should look him up. As he had told her that he could not find measuring spoons/cups in Zagreb that were not metric (and all of his recipes are in English) she had purchased some measuring gizmos for him and we brought them with us to Zagreb. At 2PM the four of us walk less than ½ mile to the *Lari & Penati* restaurant. It is a small establishment with seating for maybe a dozen people inside and eight or so folks in an outside seating area. I walk inside and ask if James Lockwood is here today. The girl at the desk points to the kitchen and I can see him, dressed in his chef apron and hat, busily preparing dishes. We say we have a gift for him from a friend in the USA and would like to briefly meet him if he has the time. Although the restaurant is very busy we are able to secure four seats outdoor. Kal and I order excellent salads while Marcia orders squash and pear soup and Marie a Capri salad. We were very much enjoying our lunch when James Lockwood comes to our table. He has shed his chef outfit and donned a wide brimmed Texas hat. We spend the next half hour having a great discussion about Zagreb, Croatia, why he came here, how he got interested in being a Chef and his career progression. He also tells us how he or one of his staff goes to the farmers market early each morning and buys the required provisions for the day, how (unlike the USA) the menu has to changed seasonally based



on the available local produce, and how barbecued ribs (from his old Texas recipe) are a main stay of the eclectic menu. We give James the gift of the measuring items that Laura had given us to transport and he pronounces them perfect. The restaurant, though small, has a loyal and expanding clientele and James says part of it is that it is known to have “the only experienced Chef in Croatia from America”.

After this lunch we walk thru the Botanical Gardens and thru more of the historic district. At 6PM we walk back to a restaurant district that we had seen earlier in the day and have a great dinner. We have found everything to be most inexpensive in Croatia. For example, we each had a great pizza and several drinks. Our bill came to maybe 1/3 of what we would expect to pay in the USA.



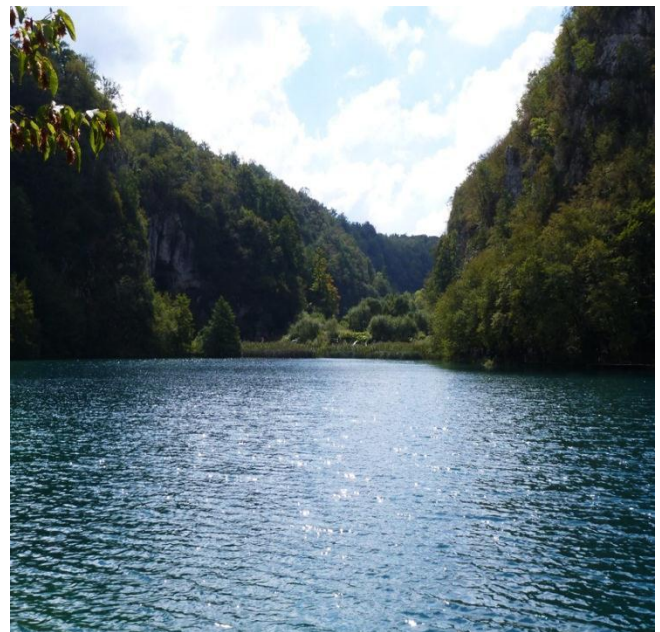
Day 4 – Adriatic Vacation – September 16th



We wake up this morning on our last day in Zagreb, Croatia. We have enjoyed our stay at the elegant and historic Regent Esplanade Hotel. The location made it a great base from which to explore the central city, the rooms were most comfortable and the staff friendly and efficient. At a little past 8:30 AM we depart in a motor coach for a 2 hour+ ride to Plitvice Lake National Park. Midway on our trip we pass through the city of Karlovac. Our Tour Director points out the rather nondescript apartment buildings ringing the eastern side of the city. She says that these are housing built by the communist Yugoslav government in the 60's and 70's for the workers. When Croatia achieved independence in the mid-90's the new democratic government “sold”

the apartments to the residents for about \$10,000. Today 80% of Croatians own their own residence. We pass through

the city and enter the western suburbs and note that the homes appear to be much newer. Our TD explains that Karlovac was on the front lines of the Homeland (Independence) War. The Yugoslav (really Serbian) forces destroyed all of the structures in the western suburbs thru artillery shelling and ground and air attacks, requiring all of the buildings to be rebuilt after the war. Soon we pass by two destroyed buildings and wrecked military vehicles and airplanes. This is the site of a memorial that is under development by Croatia to commemorate the war. Today's weather has now turned nice and sunny. Temperatures are in the mid-60's.



We are driving thru a beautiful countryside of rolling hills, forests and farms. We stop at the town of Grad Slunj and walk and view several nice waterfalls, rivers, and a quaint village. At 11 AM we arrive at Plitvice Lakes National Park which was created as a National Park in 1947 and designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. The park consists of 16 lakes, ringed by mountains and connected by a series of streams and waterfalls. The lakes were created by a process of "travertine disposition". Basically calcium carbonate dissolves in ground water and then moves up through caverns and is deposited on the surface building barriers to the rivers. This is not unique to Plitvice but takes place here on a greater scale than anywhere else. We walk for several

miles on pathways which pass many waterfalls, enjoy a quick lunch and then a 15 minute boat ride to the upper lake area. The area is most beautiful. Unfortunately at this time we have to end our trip. The park is very busy today and we did not make fast enough progress to enable us to walk the upper lake trail and get back to Zagreb in time for our early dinner.

We board our motor coach at 3 PM for the return to Zagreb. Sandra, our Tour Director, surprises us with “shots” of two types of Croatian liqueur, “Fig” and “Black Current”.....we forget any disappointment with missing the upper lake walk!

Shortly after five we stop for dinner in a private room at the Gallo Restaurant in downtown Zagreb. Our four course meals are excellent; entre choices are grilled fish or pasta with squid inks and truffles (Marcia is the brave one who chooses the latter and says it is delicious).

We now travel to the Zagreb airport and board a full Croatia Airlines Airbus A320 for a short 1 hour flight to Dubrovnik in southernmost Croatia, right on the sea. We land at the “Pearl of the Adriatic’s” airport at 10 PM and are transported to the Hilton Imperial Hotel where we will be staying for the next three nights. Sandra has told us that Dubrovnik only has 40,000 residents but is visited by 2 million tourists each year, many from Mediterranean cruise ships. She also tells us that the Hilton Hotel was destroyed by Serbian air strikes and artillery during the Homeland (Independence) War and completely rebuilt after the war ended in 1995.



Day 5 – Adriatic Vacation – September 17th



We wake up this morning after the first of three nights in Dubrovnik, Croatia... the “Jewel of the Adriatic”. After a nice breakfast on an outdoor patio at the Hilton Imperial Hotel we all meet in the hotel lobby at 9 AM for our city walking tour. Our Tour Director, Sandra, knowing that the old town will be crowded today has secured headsets (“whispers”) so that we can easily hear the commentary from our local guide. He tells us he is a native of the old city and one of the 900 people still living within its walls. We start on a short walk to the Pile Gate and enter the old city. I ask him if the numerous “pock marks” on the building directly across the street from our hotel are bullet holes and he says yes.....from the Homeland War in the early 90’s...“we will talk more about that later”.

The old city of Dubrovnik is really spectacular and exceeds our expectations. The most recognizable feature of Dubrovnik is the intact city walls, built during the 14th and 15th century, that stretch for nearly 2 miles and completely encircle the city. They were never breached by invaders or broken down by cannon fire. A major earthquake in 1667 destroyed most of the buildings in the old city but the walls were not damaged. The city was rebuilt at that time in the medieval style with red roof tiles that remain until today. We visit the Franciscan pharmacy, built in 1317 and still in operation today, the Treasury, the Franciscan Monastery complex and the Cathedral. The side streets are interesting and beautiful. Kal comments that he likes this more than Venice. We also visit a small museum dedicated to the local people who defended Dubrovnik from the Yugoslav (Serbian) army, navy and air force in the early 90’s. Surrounded by enemy troops and electricity cut off, the Croatian irregulars maintained control on the mountain fort towering over the city and the Serbs never captured Dubrovnik, which was finally completely freed at the end of hostilities in 1995. Pictures in the museum show our Hilton Imperial Hotel in flames following artillery and air strikes. Our local guide recounts his experiences living through the siege as a teenage boy.



Today is a perfect weather day with brilliant sunshine and temperatures reaching into the 80s. Our local guide now leads us up many steps to the top of the city walls. Then we walk about a mile, half way around the walls, enjoying his good commentary and the extraordinary views. Our city tour now ends at noon. The four of us spend another 45 minutes

traversing the other half of the walls, up and down many steps, and descend back down into the old city where we find a



Nice outdoor restaurant the main square and enjoy a light lunch. After lunch we ascend many more stairs to climb to the top of Fort Lovrijenac, built on a peninsula outside of the city walls to provide protection to the city from attacks from the sea.



At 5:30 PM we meet our group for what is billed as a “dinner at the home of a Dubrovnik family”. Little did we realize what a great time we would have! We take a scenic drive north for half an hour and arrive at a large farm. All 22 of us enter an ancient farm building filled with strange mechanical devices. The owner and his wife introduce themselves and explain that they grow olives and would like to show us how they used to make olive oil on their farm (before the processing was transferred to a cooperative with more mechanized equipment).

But first they serve us a shot of the local liqueur to make sure we maintain our enthusiasm! The demonstration, with some of us helping out, is most interesting and fun. Then we move to an outdoor area where we enjoy an amazing home cooked meal and much good conversation with our hosts and our fellow travelers. Our favorite part of the entre was a delicious grilled meat item called a “cevapcici”, rolled hamburger with special ingredients and spices. 3-1/2 hours after our arrival we head back to our hotel. This was a most enjoyable and a memorable night. Today’s weather could not have been better and the identical conditions are forecast for tomorrow.

Day 6 – Adriatic Vacation – September 18th

We wake up this morning after our second of three nights at the Hilton Imperial Hotel in Dubrovnik, Croatia. This is our “free day” in Dubrovnik.....no scheduled activities.

After a leisurely breakfast on the hotel’s patio we walk over to the Old Harbor in the Old City and buy tickets for a 1 hour scenic boat trip. As we are their first customers the four of us are the only ones on a large nice boat. We enjoy a pleasant boat ride around the shores of the Old City then around Lokrum Island, then along the southern shore and back to Dubrovnik. We pass the Club Med 2 cruise ship which is anchored in the harbor. It is quite striking as it has five masts from which it can raise sails and pretend it is sailing under wind power.



Back on shore we next buy tickets for a ride to Lokrum Island, just a 15 minute trip. We spend an hour or so walking around the island checking things out like the old monastery, the botanical gardens, the salt water pond and the nice views from the shoreline.



This is another spectacular weather day with brilliant sunshine, highs in the upper 70s and lows in the mid-60s. We have learned that Dubrovnik normally has 320 days a year of sunshine. We return to shore and do some souvenir shopping in the Old City. We now exit the Old City and scope out the site where we will catch the cable car to the top of a mountain towering over Dubrovnik later today. We return to our hotel to clean up before an early dinner.

At 3:30 PM the four of us meet and walk into town for an early pizza dinner. Those skinny Tinkas amaze us with the size of the pizza that they order!

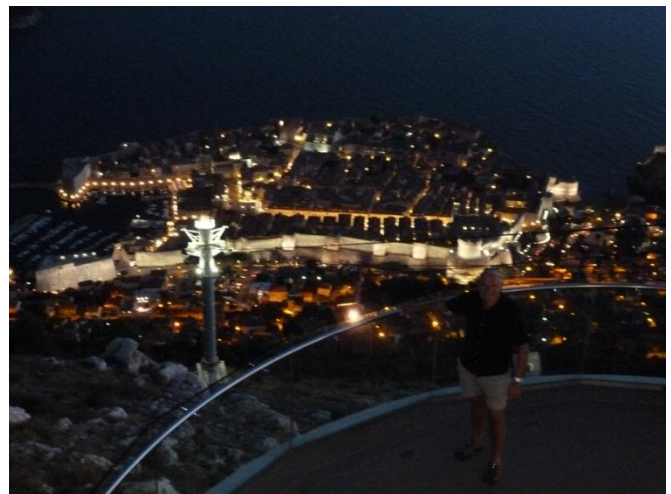
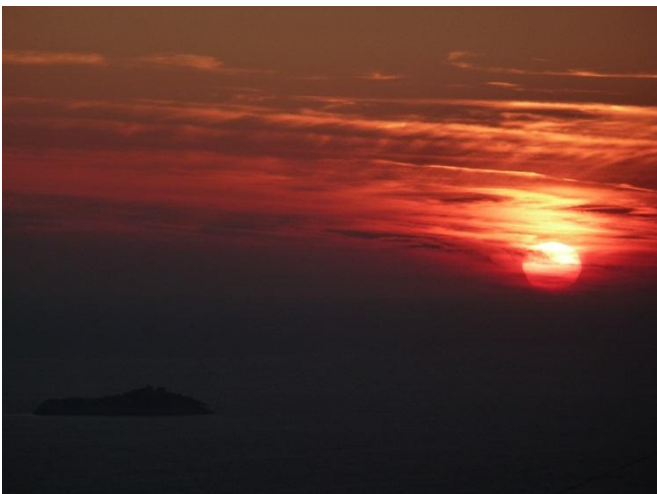


Then we catch the 5:30 PM cable car to the top of Sjb Mountain which towers over Dubrovnik. We are here to catch the sunset at about 7PM but the daylight views from the top are great.



I buy a ticket to enter the fort on the mountain top which is also a museum commemorating the 1991-1995 Homeland War. The fort was actually built in 1808 by the French Army after Napoleon had captured most of the Adriatic coast. In 1991 Croatian volunteers manned the fort, with limited weapons, and helped hold off the Yugoslav (Serbian) Army that besieged Dubrovnik. I watch a video of a compilation of a British TV war correspondent's reports from Dubrovnik during this period and am shocked at the artillery, air, and navel bombardments of the Old City, a UNESCO site. They specifically targeted the hotel rooms (destroying the hotel I am now in and reducing the number of hotel rooms in the area from 50,000 to 6,000). In 1993 the southern Croatian Army, using weapons and vehicles captured from the Serbs finally lifted the siege. I don't think I ever want to visit Serbia.

We enjoy a spectacular sunset at 7PM. The night has been perfect...clear skies, temperatures in the upper 60s and no wind.



We watch the lights below come on and then take the cable car down. We walk through the Old City and stop for some ice cream. Then back to our rooms. We leave early tomorrow for the Adriatic island of Hvar “the Queen of the Adriatic”.



Day 7 – Adriatic Vacation – September 19th

We wake up at the Hilton Imperial Hotel in Dubrovnik after a three night stay. This hotel has been most comfortable and with a great location right outside the main entrance to the Old City. Bags out by 7:15AM, nice breakfast on the patio, and board our motor coach at 8 AM.

Today we will drive about 1/3rd of the way up the Dalmatia Coast, about 120 miles “as the crow flies” to the city of Split, Croatia. The coast is hemmed in by huge mountain ranges (up to 5800 feet) and the crystal clear Adriatic Sea is dotted with hundreds of islands. This is said to be one of the most scenic rides in the world; a twisting and turning two lane road that alternatively dips down to the sea then climbs the side of mountain ranges. We 22 travelers are very comfortable in a new Mercedes Benz motor coach.



The drive does not disappoint. We are surprised that we have to clear customs as we go thru a tiny area of the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina that is that country’s only access to the sea. We stop and view the Bachinska Lakes, seven

interconnected fresh water lakes. Fresh water from springs and rivers irrigate plains used to grow crops...it reminds us of California.



At 12:30PM we arrive in Split, Croatia's second largest city with 400,000 folks. We have lunch on our own and then walk past the many outdoor stalls selling produce and products.



At 2:30PM we board a ferry for a two hour ride to the island of Hvar, our destination for the next two days. We have learned that Hvar is called the "Queen of the Adriatic" and considered the prettiest of the Adriatic islands. It's the 4th largest; 115 miles long and 6-1/2 miles wide at the widest point. There are 47 settlements totaling 12,000 people. More importantly, it is the "sunniest island" with 2800 hours of sun a year. It attracts sailors, yachters and celebrities; Tom Cruise was on Hvar last week. At 2:30 we reach the Hvar ferry dock and re-board our motor coach (it also made the trip on the ferry) for a 25 minute ride to the town of Hvar. We exit our coach and walk ¼ mile thru a car-free zone to our hotel, the Adriana. It is a small "boutique" hotel located on the main promenade along the small harbor. Our rooms are small but well laid out and we all have big windows that open to a great view of the harbor and many anchored boats and yachts.



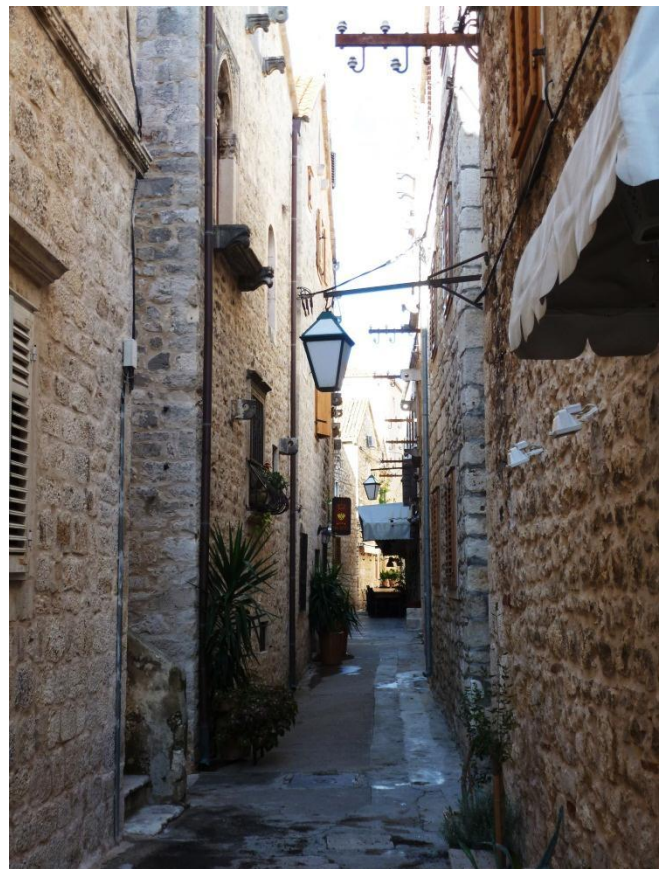
At 6:30PM we walk to a local restaurant, the Mandano, where we all have an excellent included dinner; local mussels, a nice salad and fresh bread, local fish with potatoes and crepes for desert + wine.



Day 8 – Adriatic Vacation – September 20th

We spend the first of our two nights at the Adriana Hotel on the harbor front at Hvar Town, Croatia. While the weather yesterday was fine, we are awakened at 3:30 AM this morning by a tremendous thunder and lightning storm. We watch rain pelt down on the many boats in the harbor, visible from our hotel window. By the time we go down to breakfast at 8AM the skies are clear. Today will be another perfect weather day...bright sun and highs in the lower 70s.

We meet at 9 AM for our tours of Hvar Town and Stari Gard. Our Tour Director Sandra introduces us to our Local Guide, Carman. This young woman is a native of the island of Hvar and proves to be one of the most articulate and informative local guides that we have ever had on any of our trips. In addition to showing us key sites on the island and covering the history she gives us insight into life on a rather remote island vs. living on the mainland. She tells us that Travelers Magazine has named Hvar Island one of the top 10 islands in the world (three of the others...Kauai, Bora Bora, and Mykonos the four of us have been to...also Kal and Marie have been to Capri) and we are in agreement on this rating based on what we have seen so far.



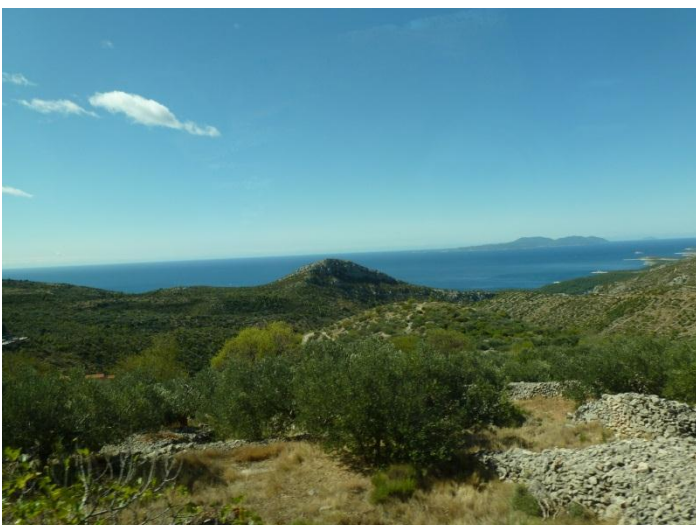
We start with a walking tour of Hvar Town, learning that it was settled in the 13th century by the Venetians. Most of the buildings in the old town date from the 15th and 16th century. We tour the Rectors Palace, Main Square and Cathedral. Walking up the narrow alleyways makes one feel like they were back in the Middle Ages. The architecture and preservation of Hvar surprises us.



We next enter the Franciscan Monastery that has been a hospice for sailors since the 15th century. In one room, filling a whole wall is a 40 foot wide by 6 foot tall painting of the Last Supper. The story behind it is riveting. In 1640 a sick sailor is left on Hvar by his crew. He has scurvy and the Monks help him recover. He asks them to order from Venice the largest canvas they can get and he then proceeds, over the course of the next two years to paint a masterpiece.



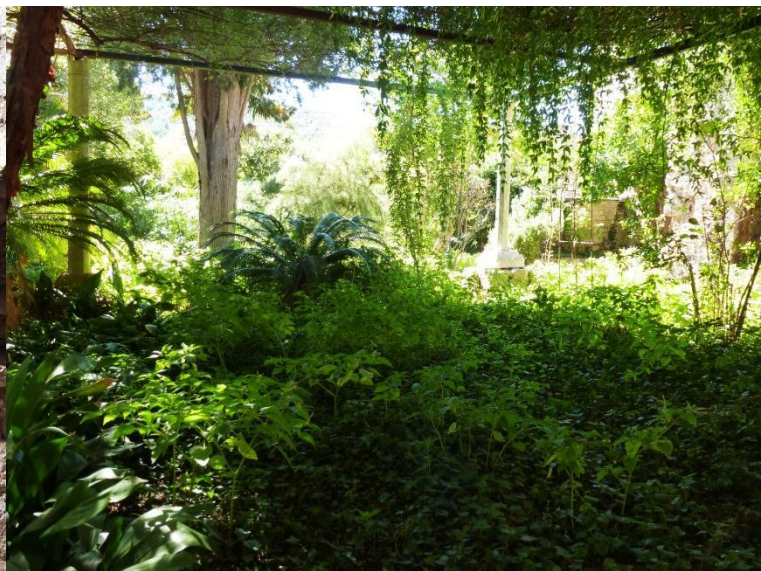
We are given a half hour of free time then board our motor coach for a drive to the town of Stari Grad. Our huge motor coach takes the "old road" over the mountain range that runs the spine of the island...it's a twisting old road that's really only 1-1/2 lanes wide. We have great views of the sea and the mountains and the land. We learn that 80% of Hvar Island's population works in the tourist industry. With only 2 to 7 inches of rainfall a year raising crops or livestock is not possible. Folks do work in the fishing industry and a good part of the land is terraced and planted in grapes, olive trees and lavender bushes for making lavender oil. We see evidence of the fires that have devastated large areas of this dry and wind swept island over that past few decades.





We arrive at Stari Grad, a town of 2500 people. We learn that it was first settled by the Illyrian people in the 6th century BC. Greeks, migrating from the overcrowded island of Pharos in 385 BC, conquered the Illyrians and then prospered until the Venetians took control of the town and all of Hvar Island in the 13th century and moved the capital to Hvar Town.

Our tour director, Sandra, now pays for our admission to a site that Odysseys Unlimited does not normally go to. It's the 15th Century home of a Renaissance man, poet and humanist philosopher Petar Hektorovic who lived from 1487 thru 1572. It was a most interesting stop.



We now take the new road, completed in the year 2000 when the 1 mile long tunnel through the mountain range was finished, back to Hvar Town where we enjoy an included lunch at our hotel at 1:30PM...excellent Cesar's salad and chocolate cake and ice cream.



The four of us now hike up to the “Spanish Fort” that sits on the 1000 foot high mountain that towers over Hvar Town. We’ve learned that although the site had been used as a defensive position by the Illyrian settlement in the 6th Century BC and by the Byzantines in the 6th

Century AD, construction of the present day fort started in the year 1282 under the Venetians. The present day fort was largely completed by the middle of the 16th Century. It is said that Spanish military engineers assisted in the construction during the 14th Century, hence the name “Spanish Fort”. The structure is most impressive and in great shape....massive turrets, arched gates, prison, a café/beer garden (appreciated after the climb up), but the best parts is the great views looking down on Hvar and the Adriatic Sea.



We meet two other couples from our tour group at the fort and I take a picture of seven of us. We continue to be most impressed with our fellow travelers. All are interesting folks, most pleasurable to travel with; most have been to a lot more foreign places than we have!



Dinner is on our own tonight, so as we descend from the fort and enter Hvar we stop and read restaurant menus to decide where to dine tonight. Hvar is more pricey than Dubrovnik and much more so than Zagreb but still less than we'd pay for comparable fare (especially drinks) in the USA. After much searching we find a place that we think will work...great view of the harbor but shielded from the wind blowing down the mountain side, nice variety on the menu and more moderately priced. At 6:30PM we walk to the "DVA Ribara" (just 50 yards to the left of the Adriana Hotel as you face the hotel) and enjoyed excellent meals in a great setting.

Day 9 – Adriatic Vacation – September 21st

We wake up this morning after a two night stay in Hvar, Croatia. Today we continue our trip up the Dalmatia Coast. We have really enjoyed our time on this beautiful island. I think we figured that this tour would go a little downhill after our three night stay at the spectacular walled city of Dubrovnik but this stop has kept the momentum going! We enjoyed the Adriana Hotel; the location could not have been better. The only complaints were from the light sleepers in our group who could hear noise from music playing in nearby bars and from young revelers...this is quite the party spot.

We meet at 9:30 AM and walk through the pedestrian only zone near the harbor to where our motor coach is parked. We have a 25 minute drive over the new road to the ferry stop at Stari Grad where we kill 1-1/2 hours before boarding the ferry and departing for Split, on the mainland, at 11:30 AM.



The two hour ferry ride is most pleasant. We all sit on the exposed upper deck and enjoy great views of Hvar, Brac, and Solta islands and the Split coastline. Also many sailing boats are out. It is fun to listen to all of the different languages being spoken by the folks on the ferry. This is another perfect weather day; brilliant sunshine and temperatures in the low 70s with light breezes.



We arrive at Split, Croatia's second largest city with a population of around 200,000, at 1:30 PM. Lunch is on our own and the four of us find a small terrace restaurant where we all have our first Croatian hamburgers.

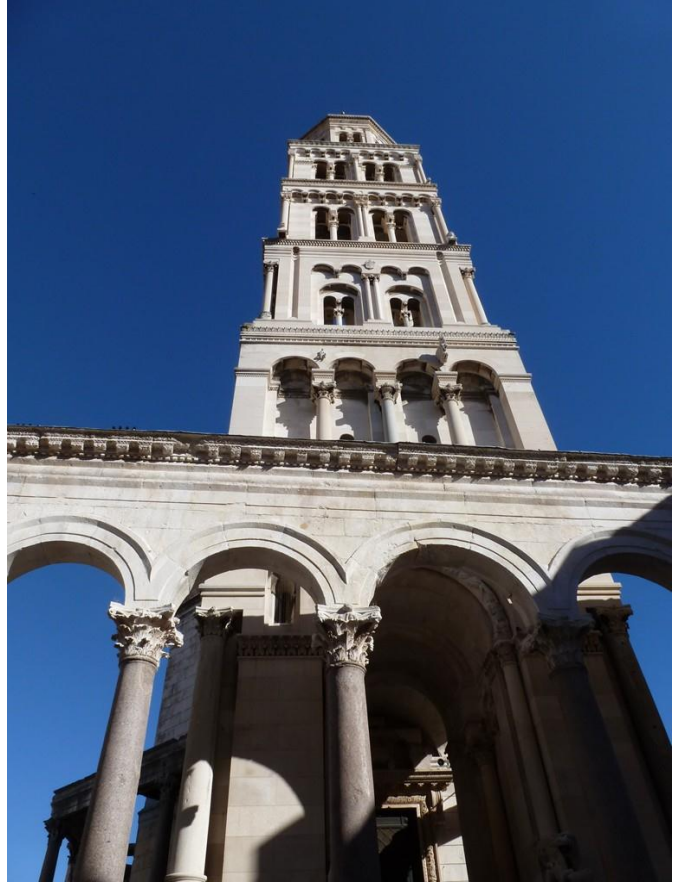


At 3 PM Tour Director Sandra introduces us to our local guide who will show us Diocletian's Palace. Our guide turns out to be an excellent one. He's a young local, spent time at school in England and speaks excellent English, very fast. He gives us a lot of information during our 1-1/2 hour tour. The palace was completed in just ten years as many slaves were used in the construction. We start our tour at a painting of how the palace looked when first completed.



We learn that Roman emperor Diocletian built this palace at the end of the 3rd century AD for his retirement. It is massive and we have a most interesting tour, seeing good examples of Greek, Roman, and Venetian architecture and construction techniques and gaining insight into how people lived at that time. One annoying item is the graffiti that we have seen all over Croatia is also evident on the walls of the palace! Croatia is attempting to install video cameras all

over the country to try and discourage this practice which is apparently deeply ingrained in some of their teenagers. Our guide also explains that after communist Yugoslavia was formed in the later 1940's, people were allowed to move into the homes of the rich and occupy one or two rooms. This happened to the stately homes inside of the palace walls and these "squatter's" descendants are still here, today. As long as they have direct descendants, they can stay. People even are living in hollowed out sections of the city walls (in domiciles with no toilets). All in all, not what one hopes to see at a UNESCO World Heritage site.



We have the next hour free and most of us sit on the main promenade enjoying refreshment and watching the local folks and tourists walk by...two large cruise ships are in port.

At 5:30 PM we depart for our one night stay at the Atrium Hotel. It is in a nearby suburb and is rather isolated from the historical part of the city but the location is fine for our short stay. It's rated 5 Stars but is really nothing special; more of a good businessman's hotel. We have a fine included dinner tonight (turkey or beef as entre choices) at our hotel and we have cake to celebrate Tour Director Sandra's birthday.

Day 10 – Adriatic Vacation – September 22nd

We are up after our one night stay at the Atrium Hotel in Split. The hotel was fine for one night. At 8 AM we board our motor coach for what will be a long day on the road, our first one (of maybe two) on this tour. We will be traveling 230 miles from Split on the south central Dalmatia coast north to Opatija on the Istrian Peninsula of northwest Croatia (near northeast Italy).

We leave Split and soon are on a first class four lane motorway. We must pass over and through the massive mountain range that defines the west coast of Croatia. On the other side of the mountains we travel north. The terrain is hilly and rocky with brush and small trees. Today will be another perfect weather day; bright sun and highs in the low 70s.

During this time we are enjoying our Tour Director Sandra's commentary on Croatia. She gives us an overview of the democratic government that was formed in 1991 following independence and then a review of Croatia's school system and social safety net. It would appear that Croatia is a very heavily taxed country. Top income tax rates are 54%, average rates are 29%, and employees have to put 21% of their pay towards social security which is matched by employers. Foreign investment in Croatia is said to be very low due to the taxes and the government bureaucracy. Unemployment and underemployment are high.

We now stop for a few hours in Zadar. This city of 80,000 people is the economic and political center of North Dalmatia. Zadar was damaged during the Homeland War in the early 1990s but suffered more major damage during World War II from the Allied bombings of the Germans who had taken control of the Dalmatian Coast from the Italians after their armistice in 1943.

We have a local guide for a tour of the Old City, which is a compact area measuring .6 mile X 600 feet. The architecture shows Roman, Venetian, Gothic and Baroque influences. We visit a cathedral that was completed in the 13th century but stands on the site of the original church that dates from the 3rd century. We see small parts of the remains of the second largest Roman forum outside of Rome. We now walk to Zadar's beautiful *Nova Riva* walkway on the seaway leading into the port. We experience the "Sea Organ" designed and built by the architect that constructed the walkway in 2005. 35 tubes in 7 groupings are buried under the walkway and emit sounds when washed with waves. The sound is something like that of the humpback whale. We next spend some time (maybe a little bit too much time) touring a museum in a monastery containing a large and beautiful collection of Roman Catholic relics.



At 12:30 PM we walk to a beautiful seaside restaurant, Fosa Restaurant, for an excellent (included) lunch.



Shortly before 2 PM we depart Zadar and pass over and through the Velebit Mountains. The views are breathtaking. We pass through several tunnels (one being well over a mile in length) and pass into the central valley. We now see farms with well laid out fields and with farm animals, something not seen on the rockier coast.



Two hours later we leave the motorway and descend to the coast stopping at the town of Senj for a break. We now start a beautiful ride north up the coast. We pass the industrial center of Kraljevica where we learn that their shipyard, in operation since 1792, shut down this year...competition from Asia shipyards putting them out of business. Although this is known as the rainiest area of Croatia, two straight years of droughts have led to forest fires and trees started to change into their autumn colors in August. We pass by our Tour Director's home town of Rijeka before arriving at our hotel in the seaside resort of Opatija at around 6 PM.

We are staying at the Bristol Hotel for the next three nights. This is an old, elegant hotel on the main road. Opatija was an Austrian winter resort area in the 1800s. There is a large wedding at our hotel tonight so our included dinner is a buffet served in the lobby. This is the first buffet we've had and it was kind of nice to have a wider selection for a change.

Day 11 – Adriatic Vacation – September 23rd

We wake up this morning at the Bristol Hotel in the center of the old resort town of Opatija, Croatia. The hotel was built in 1906. Our rooms are most comfortable; in fact we two couples each have corner rooms which are extra large.



We meet our local guide at 9 AM. He tells us that Opatija was built during “Le Belle Epoch” in the second half of the 19th century. At that time the area was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although Opatija is at the same latitude as Ottawa, Canada the combination of the warm sea, islands, mountains and its location on the eastern shore make the weather here moderate year around. Note the palm trees in front of our hotel! A railroad was built to Opatija in 1870 and the rich from Vienna began to vacation in Opatija. The air was also considered “good” here so folks began to come here for their health.

We start with a walking tour of Park Angiolina which is right across the street from our hotel. Once the property of Iginio Scarpa he built it into a horticultural monument covering 4 hectares. The nearby major port of Rijeka was Austro-Hungary’s main sea port (hundreds of thousands of immigrants left central Europe through this port to go to the USA and other countries) and sea captains were asked to bring back exotic plants. We see bamboo trees, banana bushes, Sequoia trees, Gingko trees from China and many more exotics. The park ends by connecting to a seven mile promenade that extends through the town along the sea side.



At 11 AM we board our motor coach for a half hour drive to near the top of the mountain behind the town. There we explore the old town of Moscenice, an incredibly well preserved medieval town which is now home to about 200 folks. The town is a collection of narrow streets, passage ways, stairways, and houses with balconies and arches mostly built during the 13th and 14th centuries. We visit a church built in 1640 (although it contains columns from the 8th century) and are shown around by the Priest. We next visit a 500 year old Olive Oil Mill and enjoy some grappa. Our last stop is at a small museum where we see clothing, cooking utensils and work implements from the Middle Ages. Our local guide is excellent and it is nice participating in tours with a relatively small group of 22.



On the way back to Opatija our motor coach stops at 1:30 PM outside of town allowing several of us, including Marcia and myself, to walk about an hour along the promenade back to our hotel. The weather has been mild but overcast and now it starts to rain lightly. We decide to stop at the Mali Raj Restaurant and have lunch on their covered patio facing the sea. We invite Nancy and Peter from our tour to join us. Three of us have the Croatian delicacy *Cevapcici* that we enjoyed so much at the dinner at the farm earlier on our tour. The rain stops and we continue our walk towards town. We run into Marie and Kal coming from the other direction. We end up getting back to town about 3:30 PM.



Dinner tonight is included in the tour price and we all meet at 7PM and walk to a local restaurant for an excellent dinner. Entre selections were veal or calamari. Tomorrow we explore the Istria Peninsula with the same excellent local guide that we had today.

Day 12 – Adriatic Vacation – September 24th

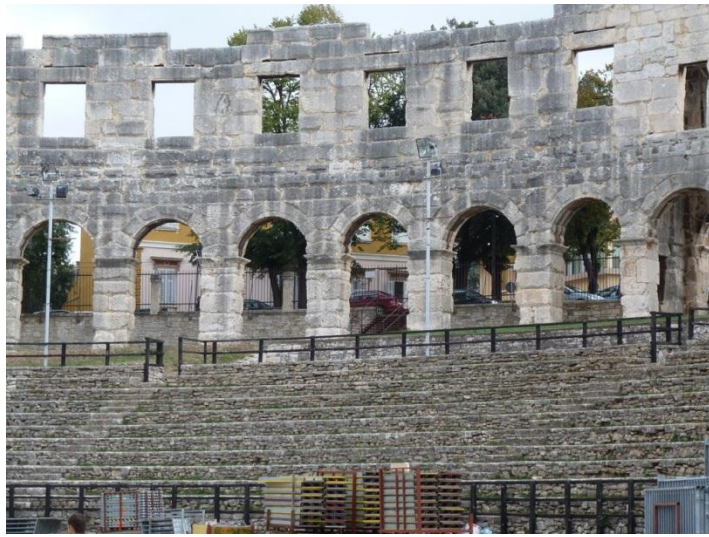
We wake up after our second of three nights at the hotel Bristol in Opatija, Croatia. A quick breakfast and we board our motor coach for today's exploration of the Istria Peninsula. The weather is overcast but mild. We start on a 90 minute drive to the city of Pula which is on the very southern part of the peninsula, first ascending up the slopes of a 4500 foot high mountain range and then passing through the range in a 3-1/2 mile long tunnel built in 1980. We have great views of the Adriatic Sea before descending into hilly valleys for the ride down the center of the peninsula to Pula.



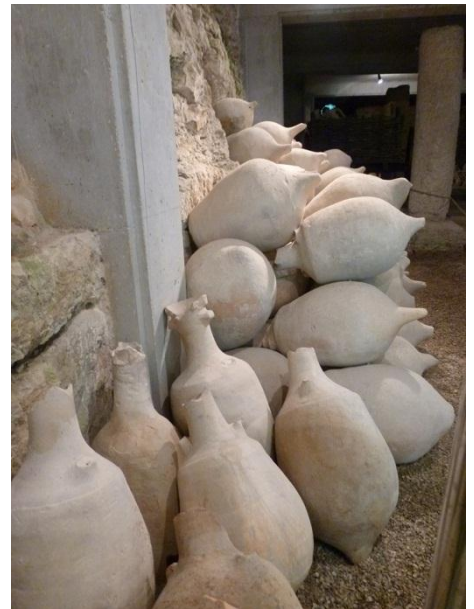
We have the same excellent local guide as yesterday. During the drive he explains the interesting history and culture of the Istria Peninsula which is in extreme northwest Croatia near Italy. Part of the Roman Empire in ancient times, it was then controlled by the Byzantine Empire and

then by the Venetians for 500 years. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 Austria assumed control of the Istria Peninsula until it passed to Italy after WWI. After WWII Istria became part of the Province of Croatia in the new country of Yugoslavia. As a result the population is a mixture of Slavs, Italians and Germans (from the Austrian connection). Croatian and Italian are co-languages and both are displayed on road signs. Truffles are the local delicacy. We pass farmers' fields and see the small huts (conjunes) that have existed for centuries to provide shelter during the day.





At 10:30 AM we arrive at Pula a city of 60,000 people. We visit the excellently preserved remains of the Roman Amphitheater, the 6th largest constructed by them. Erected in the 1st century (during the same years that the Rome Amphitheater was built) during the reign of Emperor Vespasian it was most noted for gladiator fights in front of 20,000 spectators. The amphitheater is still used today for concerts. We are surprised to see fork lifts taking out bleachers and other things and our tour guide tells us that an ice rink was constructed in the amphitheater this past weekend and ice hockey games were played in front of crowds of 7000 people! We visit the museum underneath the stands.



At 11:45 AM we depart for the town of Rovinj on the west coast of Istria. By now the sun has broken out. We arrive at Rovinj, a city of 15,000 and an old Venetian port, at 12:25 PM and enjoy a walking tour of the old city. At 1:30 PM we finish our walking tour and have two hours of free time. We have a nice lunch at a patio restaurant on the town square and then enjoy sightseeing and shopping for the rest of our free time.



At 3:30 PM we reboard our motor coach and arrive back at our hotel in Opatija at 5 PM.

At 7 PM the four of us meet to find a restaurant for dinner. Our first choice is packed and folks are waiting so we start walking up the promenade checking the posted menus for price and content. After half an hour we find an Italian restaurant with a posted menu that looks OK. It's back about 50 yards from the road down a street so we walk to it. It's an informal place with wood "picnic" tables and benches under very large umbrellas on an outside patio. Large trees tower over the area. We sit down and order. Soon we hear loud crashing sounds. Large nuts are falling from the trees and crashing onto the paved parking lot area. The whole nut is about 3" in diameter and the inner nut, which looks like a chestnut and bounces out when the outside covering shatters, is about 2" in diameter. The umbrella above our table protects us from the falling nuts and the heavy rain that has now begun to pour. The nuts frequently hit cars with a resulting loud clang. We enjoy our dinner. The rain stops and we head back to the hotel, carefully walking around the large trees!



Day 13 – Adriatic Vacation – September 25th

We wake up this morning after our third and final day at the Bristol Hotel in Opatija, Croatia. We really liked this old and centrally located hotel. It has rained quite heavily overnight but now the weather is clear. We board our motor coach for about a 200 mile drive to Italy.

After 20 minutes we enter the country of Slovenia and must go through passport control. Slovenia is a small country of only 2 million people but, unlike Croatia, is a member of the European Union. Our Tour Director Sandra keeps us entertained and informed on our drive with information about Marshall Tito, Croatia's President for Life from 1945 through 1980, her life during the Homeland War...she was 21 years old when the war started in 1991, the school system in Croatia and how they celebrate holidays.

At noon we stop at the Catina Vignaluna. We are first given a brief tour of the vineyards and wine making facility. Then we are offered tastes of five different types of wines that they produce. Next we are into the dining room for a delicious lunch. We have a most enjoyable time at the Catina. We again enjoy conversing with the other members of our tour group, a most informed, amiable, and well-traveled group of folks. The weather is sunny and warm.



It is 3 PM when we board our motor coach and head to our destination, Venice, Italy. Sandra tells us that the famous city of Venice has only 60,000 residents but hosts 12 million tourists each year. Most of the hospitality workers live outside of Venice and commute. We arrive at the outskirts of Venice, say goodbye to our motor coach and driver, and take "water taxis" to our hotel...no motor vehicles of any kind are allowed in Venice. The boats take us to the island that is Venice, through the Grand Canal and right to the front of our hotel. It is the *Hotel Bonvecchiati* and we could not be in a better location. Right in the center of Venice mid-way between St. Mark's Square and the Rialto Bridge. Our room is spacious and comfortable – Marie's and Kal's room is definitely less roomy.

We enjoy walking around and seeing the famous buildings and monuments. At seven the four of us meet and head out for "dinner on our own". We get lost several times before we find the Rialto Bridge. We have a good dinner on the outside patio of a restaurant right next to the Rialto Bridge. Meals are much more expensive (like three times!) vs. what we have been paying in Croatia. We do some window shopping in the Rialto district then head back to St. Mark's Square for some strolling at night. The tide is in, and there is some minor flooding starting in the low lying square.



Day 14 – Adriatic Vacation – September 26th

I am up early this morning, the first of two we will have in Venice, Italy. I walk from our hotel about 75 yards to St. Mark's Square and then to the waterfront area. I take some photos of the sunrise and the famous buildings (with few people crowding me or standing in front of the monuments). At this time of day the only folks out are fellow photographers and locals getting off the water "buses" to start their work day in Venice.



After breakfast Marcia and I meet most of our tour group for a 2 hours walking tour. Our local guide explains that Venice was founded on this low lying island because it was a good defensive position, protected by outlying islands and surrounded by water too deep for an army to advance through and too shallow for a navy to enter. Venice was never directly attacked. Our local guide takes us through St. Mark's Square, explaining the architecture and history, then to the waterfront and over to the Bridge of Sighs where she explains its significance and relates the story of Casanova. Then we walk to the Rialto Bridge and learn that this present bridge was built in 1588 and was the only bridge over the Grand Canal until 1830.

At 11:15 we meet Marie and Kal. They had skipped the group tour as they have been to Venice two other times and had similar tours. Instead they entered St. Mark's Cathedral and enjoyed seeing the interior, the museum on the second level and the views from the balcony. The four of us purchase tickets for a four hour tour of the three major outer islands in the Venice Lagoon.

We depart Venice at 11:30 AM and after a 20 minute boat ride we stop at Murano Island, famous for glass blowing. We see a brief glass blowing demonstration and then do some window shopping.



At 12:35 PM we depart for the island of Burano arriving at 1 PM. Burano is famous for its brightly painted houses which we are told were painted that way so that the fishermen could find their homes in the winter fog. We have a most enjoyable time walking through this peaceful town (much more so than Venice!) and looking at the colorful houses and the stands selling souvenirs. We really like Burano (and its leaning tower).



Next is the island Torcello. This is said to be the first island settled by the Venetians in the year 1200. We walk to an area with a really old church and some outer buildings, but none of the signs are in English so we really don't know what we are seeing. This was our least favorite island.



We return to Venice at 3:30 PM. Marie, Marcia and Kal go shopping in the Rialto district.

We all meet at 7 PM for our "Farewell Dinner". We have been very fortunate to have had such wonderful travelling companions on this trip and the very best Odysseys Unlimited tour guide – Sandra. It has been a most excellent trip from beginning to end.



Tomorrow we leave Venice and start our five days of independent travel and exploration of the Dolomite Mountains of Northeastern Italy.

Day 15 – Adriatic Vacation – September 27th

Today our 14 day tour with Odysseys Unlimited, *Pearls of Dalmatia*, through Croatia and ending in Venice, Italy is over. We now start six days of independent travel centered on hiking and exploring in the Dolomite Mountains of northeast Italy.

At 7:50 AM we say our final goodbyes to our excellent Tour Director, Sandra, and 11 of us from our tour group board a Venice water taxi boat right in front of our hotel. With our carry-ons and our luggage the boat is crowded and we worry about Kal's suitcase falling overboard.



After a 40 minute trip we arrive at a dock near the Venice Marco Polo Airport. Three years ago when we finished another Odysseys Unlimited tour in Venice we had to walk about half a mile with our carry-ons and wheeling our suitcases to the terminal. This time OU has us accompanied by an agent from the transfer service. Our luggage is loaded into a van for transport to the terminal and we board taxis for the ride. The agent accompanies us to the terminal where she directs our fellow travelers to the correct airline counters and us to the rental car counter.

Kal has led the research on the rental car situation and we've gotten a great deal. We pick up a Peugeot 5008 diesel fueled station wagon. Peugeot is a French car manufacturer that does not sell cars in the USA. We are only paying 220 Euros (less than \$300) for this car for five or six days. Our luggage and carry-ons easily fit in the storage area behind the second row of seats. The car is quite comfortable and we think we will enjoy it although it may be a little large for some of the driving conditions we expect to have in the mountains.

At 9:30 AM we depart the Venice airport.

