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FEBRUARY 2015

THE TRAVEL ISSUE

10 TOP WINE GETAWAYS

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CROATIA

ISTRIA

The wedge-shaped Adriatic peninsula known as Istria has a rich and dramatic history. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then ruled by Italy, later incorporated into Yugoslavia and is today governed by Croatia. Ninety percent of Istria is in Croatia, with the remainder in neighboring Slovenia and Italy. Remnants of a distant Roman past, Venetian Empire architecture, picturesque hilltop villages, panoramic sea views, year-round festivals, inspired cuisine and fantastic wines are all reasons to put Istria on your bucket list of wine regions to visit.

—Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jensen

HOTEL MELIA CORAL



WINE VAULT AT MONTE MULINI



SAN ROCCO





LOCAL IN THE KNOW

Denis Ivošević, managing director of the Istria Tourist Board, prefers to spend his time on the water. "My favorite way to spend a day with family and friends is a trip in a small boat, sailing around Kamenjak, the southernmost part of Istria. It's a very long peninsula that offers plenty of beaches, bays, magnificent nature, views and amazing sunsets. Kamenjak is a protected landscape. There are different types of beaches, some perfect for children, some for adventure sports and some that offer complete privacy."

First-timers in Istria are always astonished by the high quality of the local wine, particularly Malvasia Istriana, a white wine made in a fresh, crisp version and oak- or acacia-aged styles.

WHERE TO DINE

Said to have the largest wine list in the country, with 550 labels, Chef Tom Gretić's **Wine Vault Restaurant at the Hotel Monte Mulini** in Rovinj serves French-inspired cuisine in an airy dining room with views of the sea. At the delightful outdoor **La Cuxina** in Pula, Chef/owner Doris Cerin elevates everyday Italian-style Istrian cuisine to the next level. The focus at **Restaurant Bodulka at Hotel Velanera** in Šišan is on fresh pasta, fresher seafood and expert pairings from the extensive Croatian wine list.

WHERE TO STAY

Surrounded by olive groves and vineyards, **Villa Meneghetti** in Bale boasts just four rooms, each decorated with rustic charm. The villa also has an award-winning restaurant and extensive wine cellar. The **Hotel Meliá Coral**, in Umag, is Croatia's first adults-only hotel. Situated just feet from the beautiful Adriatic Sea, there are 244 rooms and six luxuriously appointed suites. The **Hotel San Rocco** in Brtonigla is a converted family estate with 14 neo-rustic rooms, a spa and restaurant that features excellent wines from across the region.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Stroll the ancient streets, stop for a steamy espresso and people watch, just like the locals. Visit the caves in **Pazin**—they're said to have inspired several of Jules Verne's stories—or jump on a **Park and Ride Umag** bike, a local bicycle-share program, one of the best ways to get around the immediate area.

BUDGET TIP

Pack a picnic lunch and visit the fully intact **Arena of Pula**. It was built in the 1st century, housed gladiator fights and is the sixth-largest ancient amphitheater in the world.

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit is April through October. Festivals held throughout the tourist season draw stylish crowds from across Europe.

WHERE TO TASTE

Marino Markežić ages some of his wine in terra cotta amphorae buried under lavender plants in the beautiful garden at **Kabola** in Momjan. There's also a small museum and wine shop. **Vina Geržinić** makes excellent wine and delicious olive oil. At **Vina Matošević** in Krunčiči, Winemaker Ivica Matošević is one of the

first to experiment with aging Malvasia in acacia rather than oak. There's a loft-like space above the tasting room for art openings and live music. Bold graphics cover the walls and even bolder wines fill the bottles at **Trapan's Wine Station**. At **Kozlović Vina** in Momjan, owners Gianfranco and Antonella Kozlović have created a stunning winery that blends right into the surrounding countryside. **Roxanich**, a small winery in Nova Vas, specializes in "orange" wines, which get their color from long skin contact and deep oxidized flavors from aging in barrel for three years or more.

PROMINENT WINES

First-timers in Istria are always astonished by the high quality of the local wine, particularly Malvasia Istriana, a white wine made in a fresh, crisp version and an oak- or acacia-aged style. Chardonnay is also grown across the peninsula and is bottled either oaked or unoaked. Red varieties include the indigenous Teran, which is grown in different soil types. It produces a potent red wine, often with feral characteristics, but skilled Istrian winemakers can tame it. Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot are some of the other reds grown and are often blended together, with or without Teran.

